
TED TALLY

CORMAC McCARTHY

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In the first chariot were red horses;
and in the second chariot black horses;

And in the third chariot white horses;
and in the fourth chariot grisled and
bay horses.

Then I answered and said unto the
angel that talked with me, What are
these, my lord?

And the angel answered and said unto
me, These are the four spirits of the
heavens, which go forth from standing
before the Lord of all the earth.

Zechariah 6:2-5

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT - BRIGHT MOONLIGHT

We are racing through the air, very swiftly, looking down at a stark world. Patches of sand and sagebrush flash beneath us, blurring into abstractions. Saguaros, clumps of chaparral. Then after some moments we hear a loud drumming sound, louder and louder, frightening in its power. The earth itself shakes, as if we were approaching some vast cataract...

All at once we overtake a herd of galloping mustangs; we are above them, flying along at their speed. There are as many as thirty horses, dappled, solid, all of them rendered by this eerie light into shades of black, white and gray...

Suddenly we are down amongst them, running with them; their images shiver into SLOW MOTION as they turn, all at once, in uncanny unison, responding to some unseen signal...

Across the front rank of the galloping herd, the animals overlap like those in a classical frieze. Straining necks, bobbing and thrusting heads, as if they were breasting a surf...

Sand explodes from their thundering hooves, as their shadows in the moonlight chase them across the sand...

Great muscles ripple beneath their shoulders, and along their smooth flanks...

Their ragged manes blow backwards like spume...

Their long teeth are bared, tongues lolling...

Their huge wet mysterious eyes glisten...

Then at last, the herd splits against a rock outcropping, flows around it. As we shiver back into NORMAL SPEED, the herd swirls together on the far side as smoothly as a rushing tide. And then abruptly it is gone. Vanished, like a dream of horses. Leaving only the silent desert and the pale moon...

FADE TO:

INT. GRADY RANCH - DINING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON a framed antique lithograph of horses, bursting out of a pole corral. Contorted, unlikely postures.

A 10 year-old boy, JOHN GRADY COLE, stares up at this image, captivated, from his seat at a polished walnut dining table. Somewhere nearby a mantel clock is ticking.

JOHN GRADY
Granddaddy? What kind of horses are those?

His GRANDFATHER looks up from the chess game that lies between them. In his 70s, with weathered skin, yellow-white mustaches. He studies the lithograph for a moment.

GRANDFATHER
Picturebook horses.

A hint of a smile. The boy grins back, shy with love for this stern old man. With careful deliberation, his grandfather moves a knight. The clock's ticking becomes louder, then louder still, till suddenly it stops, as we see...

INT. SAME ROOM - DAY

The grandfather's pale face, eyes shut, hair combed with unnatural precision. Hands folded across his chest.

John Grady, now a lean and handsome 16 year-old, is wearing a new, unaccustomed black suit. Holding his hat in his hands, he stares down at the old man's features.

His open coffin lies on the dining room table. The picture of the horses looms above it. In front of the coffin, a candle flickers in its glass, flanked by lilies. An elderly Mexican WOMAN, dressed in mourning, sits by the sideboard.

JOHN GRADY
I appreciate you lightin the candle, Luisa.

LUISA
Cómo?

JOHN GRADY
La candela. La vela.

LUISA
No fui yo. La señora.

John Grady is surprised, upset.

JOHN GRADY
My mother? She was here?

LUISA

Si. She say not to wake you.

He ponders this for a moment, then turns. Luisa watches, concerned, as he leaves the room.

INT. FRONT HALL

As John Grady walks towards the door, his boots echoing in the high-ceilinged Victorian hall, he passes oil portraits and faded sepia photographs of his ancestors: bearded men, bonnetted, thin-lipped pioneer women, tintypes of children.

WE LINGER for a moment on a framed photograph of a handsome, confidently smiling couple. The man, mid-30s, is seated and wears crisp army khakis; the beautiful woman standing behind him, with her hands on his shoulders, is much younger. John Grady's PARENTS, as they appeared seven years ago.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

John Grady steps onto the porch, crosses to the railing, still holding his hat. The house's once-white gingerbread is stained, peeling. He looks out across the ranch...

Barns, fences, scattered out-buildings, all in need of some attention. Dusty pickup trucks and horse trailers are sprawled here and there. The whole place feels less empty than abandoned. Beyond this compound is a vast, featureless prairie. We hear the distant moan of a passing train...

The boy has tears in his eyes. But he fights them back as he settles his hat firmly in place.

EXT. A CEMETERY - DAY

A country cemetery, on a low hill, seen from a distance. A knot of parked cars, trucks, is off to one side by a grove of cottonwoods. A temporary awning has been built over the gravesite. A fierce prairie wind flaps the canvas.

TITLE OVER: SAN ANGELO, TEXAS, 1949.

EXT. BENEATH THE AWNING

A PREACHER is leading a hymn, "Abide With Me," by the open grave. The MOURNERS, in their straggling ranks of folding chairs, must battle the wind to be heard. The women have to hold their hats on.

John Grady is sitting next to his father, COLE, who is shockingly reduced from the confident soldier of the photograph.

Thin, frail, lost in his clothes. He is staring down at his dusty boots.

Pained, the boy looks away from his father. Across from the two of them, on the other side of the casket, he sees...

His MOTHER, crying softly. Her once-slender beauty has gone a bit fleshy, but she is still conspicuous, among these plain country faces, with her silk headscarf and long gloves, her beaver coat. When her gaze meets John Grady's, stains of mascara give her eyes a haunted look. She cannot face him long.

EXT. THE CEMETERY - LATER

The service has ended. Most of the mourners are leaving, though a few still linger in little clumps, talking. Cole, the last person sitting under the awning, eases out a hip flask, uncaps it and sips, a quick practiced gesture.

As men and women reach their cars, we PICK OUT a BURLY MAN in a suit and topcoat, standing by a shiny new Fleetwood, smoking a cigarette. Through its open window, the sound of radio swing music. The man glances at his wristwatch.

John Grady is making his way through the departing crowd as they drift towards their cars. Here and there someone offers condolences; he nods politely, shakes hands, but his eyes are searching ahead with increasing urgency. He sees...

His mother reaching the Cadillac. The burly man tosses aside his cigarette, greeting her with a quick kiss, then opens her door. As she is about to climb inside, her eyes meet John Grady's once again.

He stops in his tracks, staring at her with aching sadness. A helpless, wordless plea...

She looks back at him, trying to offer a smile, but after a few moments cannot bear to meet his gaze. Averting her eyes, she ducks quickly into the car. The man, with a final glance at John Grady, crosses around to open the driver's door. He starts the engine and drives off.

As John Grady is staring after the departing plume of dust, LACEY RAWLINS, 17, comes up beside him. Rawboned and restless in his too-small suit, his unaccustomed necktie. He looks at his best friend, worried.

RAWLINS

What did she say?

JOHN GRADY

She didnt say nothin. What could she say.

RAWLINS

What do you aim to do?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know.

He looks back towards his father, hunched alone under the distant awning. The empty canvas chairs are starting to blow over in the wind, and two or three of them skitter off crazily among the tombstones...

INT. A CORRIDOR - DAY

On a pebbled glass door, twin arcs of gilt lettering read: "J.C. Franklin / Attorney-at-Law."

SECRETARY (V.O.)

What's your name, honey?

INT. SECRETARY'S OFFICE

John Grady stands before the SECRETARY, a blonde in her 40s. He's still in his dark funeral suit, holding his hat.

JOHN GRADY

John Grady Cole. He knows me.

INT. LAW OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

FRANKLIN is at his desk, a tall bookcase behind him. John Grady sits stiffly before him, holding his hat.

FRANKLIN

As his only child, your mother inherits outright. Its her property now, she can do whatever she wants with it.

JOHN GRADY

I dont have any sayso.

FRANKLIN

You're a minor.

JOHN GRADY

What about my father.

FRANKLIN
They're divorced.

John Grady looks down into his hat.

FRANKLIN
It's a sorry piece of business, I know. But son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven. She dont want to live out there, that's all. If it was a payin proposition that'd be one thing. But it aint.

JOHN GRADY
It could be. Why couldnt I run it myself?

Franklin sighs unhappily. He looks out the window.

JOHN GRADY
I been workin there all my life. I know cattle, I know horses... Mr. Franklin, that's my home.

FRANKLIN
It's his own damn fault. Your father signed ever last paper she put in front of him. Never lifted a hand to save himself. I told him to get a lawyer. Told? Hell, I begged him.
(pause)
Wayne tells me he's quit goin to the doctor, too.

JOHN GRADY
Well. I thank you for your time.

He rises and puts on his hat. Franklin rises too.

FRANKLIN
I'm sorry not to have no better news for you, son. But some things in this world cant be helped. And I believe this is probably one of them.

EXT. PRAIRIE - SUNSET

John Grady, now wearing ordinary workclothes, rides swiftly along on his sorrel pony, REDBO. He has a beautiful ease and grace in the saddle; horse and rider seem like one being,

casting a long shadow as they reach the crest of a low rise. Here he dismounts, dropping the reins. He walks out and stands still for a long moment, like a man come to the end of something.

In the brush at his feet is an old horseskull. He squats, picks this up. Frail, bleached paper white, with huge loose teeth. He runs his fingers along the cranium joints. When he tips it over, sand trickles from the eye sockets.

Still kneeling with the skull, he looks back the way he came, at the distant cluster of ranch buildings. Rising, he turns.

Before him, beneath great reefs of bloodred clouds, the infinite plain seems to beckon.

He stares towards the horizon, pondering...

INT. EAGLE CAFE - SAN ANGELO - DAY

John Grady and his father are sitting in a booth at the back of the cafe. Neither has eaten much of his steak and potatoes. Cole lights a cigarette, coughing as he exhales.

JOHN GRADY

You aint got no business smokin them things.

Cole looks up at him. His eyes are sunken, burning.

COLE

When I come round askin you what I'm supposed to do you'll know you're big enough to tell me.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir.

Cole sets his scuffed Zippo down on top of his cigarette pack. The lighter's insignia reads "Third Infantry."

COLE

You need any money?

JOHN GRADY

No.

COLE

You'll be all right... You still seein that Barnett girl?

John Grady shakes his head. He is picking at his food. A

WAITRESS pours more coffee for them, then moves off.

COLE

She quit you or did you quit her?

JOHN GRADY

I don't know.

COLE

That means she quit you.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

COLE

You know I thought the world of that old man, dont you?

The boy looks out the window.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

COLE

Dont go to cryin on me now.

JOHN GRADY

I aint.

COLE

Well dont.

JOHN GRADY

He always thought you all would get back together.

COLE

I know he did.

Another silence. The boy pushes his plate away.

JOHN GRADY

What do you think I should do?

COLE

I dont think there's much you can do.

JOHN GRADY

Will you talk to her?

COLE

I caint talk to her.

JOHN GRADY

You could talk to her.

COLE

Last conversation we had was in San Diego California in 1942. It aint her fault. I aint the same as I was. I'd like to think I am. But I aint.

JOHN GRADY

You are inside. Inside you are.

Cole coughs again, harshly.

COLE

Inside...

There is a silence. Cole looks out the window to the empty street. Smoke hangs in the air between them.

COLE

Your mother and me never agreed on a whole lot... She liked horses. I thought that was enough. That's how dumb I was... It wasnt just the war. She left the first time when you was still just a baby. I know you know somethin about that and it was a mistake not to of told you. She was gone two years. Luisa looked after you. Her and Abuela.

The boy nods. Cole clears his throat, looks at him.

COLE

She come back because of you, not me. I guess that's what I wanted to say.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir.

COLE

She's goin to be around a long longern me. I'd like to see you all make up your differences.

John Grady is quiet. His father looks at his cigarette.

COLE

I wouldnt be here if it wasnt for her... When I was in the V.A. hospital I'd talk to her by the hour, and her

COLE (contd.)

not even there. I made her out to be like somebody who could do anything. I'd tell her about some of the other old boys that I didnt think was goin to make it and I'd ask her to look after them and to pray for them. I guess I was a little crazy. But if it hadnt been for her I wouldnt of made it... I never told that to nobody. She dont even know it.

John Grady is silent, moved. When Cole stubs out his cigarette, his hand trembles like an old man's.

EXT. ST. ANGELUS HOTEL - DAY

At the sidewalk entrance of a residential hotel, father and son pause awkwardly, uncertain how to part. Cole takes a key with a numbered wooden tag out of his coatpocket.

COLE

Go on up to my room. There's somethin belongs to you in the closet.

JOHN GRADY

What is it?

COLE

Just somethin I got for you. I was goin to save it for your birthday but I'm tired of walkin over it. Anyways you look like you could use some cheerin up. Go on now.

John Grady takes the key.

COLE

Just leave the key at the desk when you come down. I got to see some old boys about a poker game.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir.

He looks up at his father. They each feel a wrenching need to embrace, but they cannot. They cannot.

COLE

I'll see you, then.

JOHN GRADY

All right.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR

John Grady comes down a long, gloomy corridor, passing numbered doors, before he finally reaches his father's. He hesitates a moment, then unlocks it with the key.

INT. COLE'S ROOM

The boy steps inside, shuts the door behind him. He looks around the room...

A radio, a hotplate, an ironing board. The single bed is neatly made. Some socks and underwear are drying on hangers in the bathroom. A whole sad suitcase of a life is revealed in these four walls.

John Grady goes to the closet, opens it. He is surprised...

On the floor there, along with two pairs of boots and a pile of dirty shirts, is a brand new, expensive-looking saddle: a Hamley Formfitter.

He picks this up by the horn, carries it over to the bed, swings it up where he can get a better look. He stands marvelling at its beauty, running his fingers gently over the rich shiny tooled leather.

When he looks up again, his eyes are far away.

EXT. RAWLINS' HOUSE - DUSK

A distant farmhouse, with a barn and sheds beyond. A MAN comes out onto the porch, with yellow light streaming past him from inside. He stares out into the shadowy yard.

MAN

Lacey...! Lacey Rawlins...! Where
are you, boy? I'll tan your hide
till it wont hold shucks.

After a moment, hearing no reply, he goes back into the house, swaying a bit. The screen door bangs behind him.

EXT. A ROAD NEARBY

John Grady and Lacey Rawlins lay on the road, feeling the heat of the blacktop against their backs. John Grady turns his head, listens.

JOHN GRADY
Is that somebody hollerin for you?

RAWLINS
Probably.

He tosses pebbles, one after another, down the highway. The glow of the town is on the horizon. A pause. He looks at John Grady.

RAWLINS
You told your old man yet?

JOHN GRADY
What would be the point?

RAWLINS
When do you have to be out?

JOHN GRADY
Closing's the first of June.

RAWLINS
You could wait till then.

JOHN GRADY
What for?

Rawlins considers this. He tosses another pebble. A soft urgency has entered John Grady's voice.

JOHN GRADY
Down in Mexico they got ranches so big you cant ride from one end to the other in a week. It aint all fenced in and sold off and played out, not down there. You think they cant use two more top hands?

Rawlins seems powerfully attracted, but hesitates. He tosses another pebble.

RAWLINS
Real cowboys, huh?

JOHN GRADY
Just like the old time waddies.

EXT. RAWLINS' BARNYARD - DAY

Rawlins is pouring feed for a flock of turkeys. They swarm at his legs, gobbling idiotically, as he shuffles around

their trough with his heavy bucket. John Grady is leaning against the barn wall, chewing on a blade of grass.

JOHN GRADY

So what do you think?

RAWLINS

I dont know... You got a lot more reasons for leavin than me.

JOHN GRADY

What the hell reasons you got for stayin? You think somebody's goin to die and leave you some more turkeys?

RAWLINS

Shit no.

JOHN GRADY

That's good. Cause they aint.

The sound of a door slamming, in the distance, and the man's hoarse shouting.

MAN'S VOICE

Lacey...? Where are you, boy?

Rawlins reacts, a quick flash of anger, then calms himself.

RAWLINS

I got to get on with my chores.

JOHN GRADY

Suit yourself.

Rawlins wipes his arm across his forehead. He looks over again at John Grady.

RAWLINS

If I dont go will you go anyways?

JOHN GRADY

I'm already gone.

EXT. ST. ANGELUS HOTEL - NIGHT

John Grady walks slowly down a sidewalk, then stops. He stands beneath a street lamp looking up towards the hotel. His breath steams a bit in the cool night air.

In a fourth floor window his father can be seen, smoking, pacing obsessively behind gauzy, parted curtains. He turns,

then paces back again, like a tin cutout in a shooting gallery. A slow, thin, agonized figure.

John Grady watches with helpless sorrow for a few moments more. Then he turns, walks quietly away down the street...

EXT. GRADY RANCH - DAWN

John Grady stands in the yard, in the gray dawn light, checking the straps on Redbo. The horse is heavily packed, with bulging saddlebags and a bedroll. As he comes around the horse, patting its neck, John Grady pauses.

Luisa, in her black dress, stands waiting to bid him farewell. The old woman's wispy white hair blows in the wind.

John Grady crosses to her. They look into one another's eyes. Silently she reaches to her own throat, where a small crucifix dangles from a silver chain. She removes this, looks at him. He removes his hat, bows his bare head. She gently places the chain around his neck. He straightens. As he embraces her, there are tears in her eyes.

John Grady's face, seen over her shoulder, is wracked with sadness and loss.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAWN

John Grady, astride Redbo, reaches the crest of a hill and pauses, looking down towards the Rawlins farmhouse and its outbuildings, hushed and peaceful. He makes a little sound with his teeth and Redbo starts down towards the farm.

EXT. RAWLINS' BARN

Dismounted now, John Grady leads Redbo quietly along one outside wall of the barn. He pauses near the corner, looking off towards...

The farmhouse, which is still dark.

Redbo sniffs the air, pushes his nose against John Grady's elbow. A loud whisper from the barn.

RAWLINS (O.S.)

That you, bud?

JOHN GRADY

You better hope so.

Rawlins walks his own horse, JUNIOR, out of the barn. Junior is a big dappled gray. Rawlins is still trying to tighten

his cinch, an awkward challenge with the horse so restless.

JOHN GRADY

You ready?

RAWLINS

Yeah.

JOHN GRADY

They suspect anything?

RAWLINS

Naw.

JOHN GRADY

Well let's go.

RAWLINS

Hang on a minute. I just piled everything on top of Junior and walked him out here.

In the farmhouse, a light comes on.

JOHN GRADY

Yonder goes a light.

RAWLINS

Damn.

Jonh Grady picks up his reins, swings up into his saddle.

JOHN GRADY

You'll be late for your own funeral.

RAWLINS

He might just be gettin him a glass of milk or somethin.

JOHN GRADY

He might just be loadin a shotgun.

Rawlins scrambles up into his saddle.

RAWLINS

You ready?

JOHN GRADY

I been ready.

They trot their horses past the barn, then angle across the property towards the open gate, as more lights come on in

the house behind them. Quickening into a canter, they pass through the gate and pound into the open pastureland beyond, clods of dirt leaping from their horses' hooves...

Rawlins turns in his saddle, looking back as the lights of the house fall away behind them. He looks across at John Grady, who grins. Rawlins lets out a whoop of triumph.

RISING ANGLE, REVEALING a stirring panorama as the two boys ride on, galloping now, turning south, with the flaming ball of a new sun at their elbows, the whole vast prairie opening before them, and ten thousand worlds for the choosing...

EXT. THE PLAINS - DAY

In brief montage, the boys ride across a two-lane blacktop as a passing TRUCKDRIVER salutes them with a wave... past a lonesome crossroads filling station, where a TEENAGER looks up from changing a tire... and finally down a grassy valley, scattering a herd of grazing cows...

EXT. A GULLY - NIGHT

The great bowl of sky is brilliant with stars. In a little gully, close by a stream, the boys have made camp and lit a fire. They rest on their saddle blankets, using their saddles as headrests. Their horses nicker softly from nearby. Rawlins lights a handrolled cigarette with a burning stick.

RAWLINS

What did you bring to shoot with?

JOHN GRADY

Just my grandad's old thumb-buster.

RAWLINS

Can you hit anything with it?

JOHN GRADY

Naw.

Rawlins grins. He takes a puff, exhales happily.

RAWLINS

We really done it, didn't we?

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

RAWLINS

You think they'll be huntin us?

JOHN GRADY

What for?

Rawlins seems a bit deflated by this. Then he shrugs.

RAWLINS

I dont know. Just seems too damn
easy in a way.

They're silent for a moment or two. The fire crackles. They
watch their sparks ascend towards the stars.

RAWLINS

I'll tell you what, though...

JOHN GRADY

Tell it, cousin.

RAWLINS

I could get used to this life.

He holds out his cigarette, tapping the ash off with a deli-
cate motion of his forefinger. He grins.

RAWLINS

It wouldnt take me no time at all.

EXT. HIGH PLATEAU - DAY

The horses trot along a dirt road, raising clouds of dust.
This is rolling country, caprock mesas and yuccas in bloom.
As they descend into a broad swale or bajada, John Grady
pauses, looking back. Rawlins wheels around, stops.

JOHN GRADY

There's been somebody followin us.

RAWLINS

Did you see em?

JOHN GRADY

Not yet.

RAWLINS

Somebody horseback?

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

They study the distant plateau, where the faintest puff of
dust can be seen rising, distorted by the shimmering heat.

RAWLINS

What do you reckon they want?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know.

EXT. CEDAR GROVE - DAY

In the concealing shade of a stand of cedar, Rawlins is asleep, hat over his face. The horses are tethered to a branch behind him. John Grady kicks his boot and Rawlins wakes, sitting up. John Grady hands him a pair of binoculars. He gestures, and they both look down towards...

The road, where a RIDER is approaching, still about a hundred yards away. As he comes closer he slows, looking off to each side as if puzzled. He wears a broadbrim hat and bib overalls. His horse is a huge, beautiful thoroughbred BAY with distinctive black points.

RAWLINS

It's some kid.

JOHN GRADY

That's a hell of a horse.

RAWLINS

Aint it though.

EXT. THE ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The rider, JIMMY BLEVINS, is 13. His face is dirty, streaked with sweat. He is riding slowly along, studying the weeds for exit tracks, when John Grady and Rawlins come riding down into the road behind him. Blevins stops, looking back. He pushes his hat back on his head and watches as they ride up, one on either side of him.

RAWLINS

You huntin us?

BLEVINS

Naw. I aint huntin you.

RAWLINS

How come you followin us?

BLEVINS

I aint. I'm goin to Langtry. I don't know who you all are.

Rawlins looks at John Grady, who is rolling a smoke. He

studies the kid and his outfit and his horse.

JOHN GRADY
Where'd you get the horse?

BLEVINS
It's my horse.

John Grady takes a wooden match from his shirt, pops it with his thumbnail, lights his cigarette.

JOHN GRADY
How old are you, son?

BLEVINS
Sixteen.

RAWLINS
You're a lyin sack of green shit.

BLEVINS
You dont know everthing.

RAWLINS
I know you aint no goddamn sixteen.
What'd you do, run off?

BLEVINS
What if I did?

He looks at them defiantly. Rawlins looks at John Grady.

RAWLINS
We could sell his horse in Mexico.

JOHN GRADY
Yeah. You want to?

RAWLINS
I aint diggin no grave like we done
that last one.

JOHN GRADY
Hell, that was your idea. I was the
one said just leave him for the buz-
zards.

Blevins is staring at them, his eyes big under the absurd
hat brim, as Rawlins takes out a coin.

RAWLINS
Call it.

JOHN GRADY

Heads.

The coin spins in the air. Rawlins catches it, slaps it on his wrist, then holds it out for viewing. John Grady grins.

JOHN GRADY

Let me have your rifle.

RAWLINS

It aint fair. You shot the last three.

JOHN GRADY

Well go on then. You can owe me.

RAWLINS

Hold his horse. It might not be gun-broke.

BLEVINS

You all aint shot nobody.

RAWLINS

What makes you think you wouldnt be somebody good to start with?

BLEVINS

You're just funnin... I knowed it all along.

JOHN GRADY

Who's huntin you?

BLEVINS

Nobody.

JOHN GRADY

They're huntin that horse though, aint they?

The boy is silent. Rawlins leans over, spits on the ground.

RAWLINS

You aint ridin with us. You'll get us thowed in the jailhouse.

BLEVINS

He belongs to me!

RAWLINS

Son, I dont give a shit who he belongs to. But he damn sure dont belong to

RAWLINS (contd.)
you. Let's go bud.

He and John Grady turn their horses away and chuck them and trot off again down the road south, not deigning to glance back. Rawlins mutters out of the side of his mouth.

RAWLINS
I thought he'd put up more of a argument.

JOHN GRADY
We aint seen the last of his skinny ass.

As they ride on, Blevins sits his horse in the middle of the road, watching them go...

EXT. RIVER BLUFF - DAY

John Grady and Rawlins ride out onto a rocky bluff and stop. They stare down from this height, awed...

Below them is a wide band of clay colored water, covered with rips and sandbars. The opposite bluffs are stained and cave-pocked. The river snakes away for miles.

Both boys take their hats off, an unconscious reverence.

RAWLINS
That's her, aint it?

John Grady nods. Rawlins shakes his head, amazed.

RAWLINS
That's the goddamn Rio Grande...

EXT. RIVER CANYON - DAY

The boys ride across a broad gravel wash. They pause, sitting their horses, studying the river, the country beyond...

The water looks swift, roiling, treacherous. Swallows are swooping down from the opposite bank, among the mesquite.

JOHN GRADY
We can cross down yonder off that shoal.

RAWLINS
Why dont we do it right now?

JOHN GRADY
I'll do whatever you want.

RAWLINS
I'd sure like to get it behind me
if we're goin to.

JOHN GRADY
I would too pardner.

He turns, looks at Rawlins, who hesitates. They both look again at the turbulent water, the immense and baking desert that stretches away from the far shore.

RAWLINS
You reckon we might better rest up
these horses first?

JOHN GRADY
Good idea.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

While their horses drink, the boys sit on some rocks nearby, scooping Vienna sausages out of the cans with their fingers.

RAWLINS
Wonder what they're doin back home?

JOHN GRADY
Aw, they're havin a great ol time.
Probly struck oil. I'd say they're
in town about now pickin out their
new cars and all.

RAWLINS
Shit...

Rawlins is staring off. John Grady follows his gaze...

Jimmy Blevins is walking his horse towards them, coming along the river's edge, splashing through the shallows. He's still some distance off.

Rawlins throws his can away, disgusted. He stands up, wiping his fingers on his jeans.

RAWLINS
I got a uneasy feelin about that
little son of a bitch.

JOHN GRADY

I do too.

RAWLINS

He aint as green as he looks, neither.

Rawlins crosses to Junior, pulls his little 25-20 carbine from its scabbard. John Grady stands up, watching Blevins as he comes closer, finally stopping his horse in the shallows, twenty feet away.

BLEVINS

There wont be nobody huntin me in Mexico.

RAWLINS

That all depends on what you done.

He is holding the rifle loosely down by one leg. The kid watches him carefully, but without fear.

JOHN GRADY

What's your name?

BLEVINS

Jimmy Blevins.

RAWLINS

You got any grub?

BLEVINS

No.

RAWLINS

You got any money?

BLEVINS

No.

RAWLINS

You're just a deadhead.

The kid shrugs. His horse takes a step in the water, stops. Rawlins shakes his head, spits onto the rocks.

RAWLINS

Tell me just one thing.

BLEVINS

All right.

RAWLINS

What the hell would we want you with
us for?

Blevins squints at the sandy water, then off towards the blue
sierras to the south. Finally he hitches up the shoulder strap
of his overalls, peers at them again.

BLEVINS

Cause I'm an American.

Rawlins looks helplessly at John Grady. He is still studying
the boy, but now with just a hint of a smile.

EXT. RIO GRANDE - NIGHT

Thin and pale in the bright moonlight, naked but for their
hats, the three boys cross the river, clinging to the necks
of their swimming horses. They have strapped their gear atop
the saddles and hung their clothing and boots around their
own necks. Rawlins holds his carbine aloft in one hand...

They emerge one after another, dripping, onto the gravel
beach of the alien shore. Dropping their boots and wads of
clothing, they take their hats off, looking back at the
country they've left. No one speaks. Then suddenly they all
three put their horses to a gallop up the beach, then turn
and race back again, whooping and laughing, fanning their
horses with their hats. They pull up, patting their horses
on the shoulder. They're all a little breathless.

RAWLINS

Goddamn. You know where we are?

They look at one another, smiling, but then their smiles
fade. A little moment of sober reflection, each boy lost in
his own thoughts, before John Grady finally chucks Redbo
with his bare heels. He rides back towards their clothing.
Rawlins glances at Blevins disdainfully, then follows. The
kid tags along after them.

EXT. A MESQUITE PLAIN - DAY

A frying pan and coffeepot are resting on the coals of a
breakfast fire. The boys sit around it, eating bacon and
beans off tin plates. Rawlins and John Grady watch as
Blevins swabs his greasy plate with a hunk of cornbread,
then stuffs the crumbling handful into his mouth.

RAWLINS

When'd you eat last?

BLEVINS

The other day.

RAWLINS

The other day.

BLEVINS

Yeah.

Rawlins glances at John Grady, who sips some coffee.

RAWLINS

Your name aint Blivet is it?

BLEVINS

It's Blevins.

RAWLINS

You know what a blivet is?

BLEVINS

What.

RAWLINS

A blivet is ten pounds of shit in a five pound sack.

Rawlins grins at John Grady, who gives him a little shake of the head: Leave him be. Blevins chews for a moment or two more, looking off towards the distant mountains.

BLEVINS

You aint said what your all's names was.

JOHN GRADY

John Grady Cole. This here is Lacey Rawlins. We're from up around San Angelo.

BLEVINS

I'm from Uvalde County. Up on the Sabinal River.

RAWLINS

What made you light out for Mexico, Blevins?

BLEVINS

Same reason as you.

RAWLINS

What reason is that?

BLEVINS

Cause you knowed they'd go bow-legged and blind findin your ass down here.

RAWLINS

There aint nobody huntin me.

A pause. Blevins looks at his plate, picking at the crumbs. His voice is very soft.

BLEVINS

I told that son of a bitch I wouldnt take another whippin off of him and I didnt.

RAWLINS

Your daddy?

BLEVINS

My daddy never come back from the war.

His eyes meet John Grady's: a little shared moment.

RAWLINS

Your stepdaddy?

BLEVINS

Yeah.

RAWLINS

Lord. You aint kilt him have you?

BLEVINS

I would of. He knowed it too.

Rawlins shakes his head bleakly. He looks over at the big handsome bay, tethered beside Junior and Redbo.

RAWLINS

Suppose we wanted to trade that horse off for one less likely to get us shot.

BLEVINS

I aint tradin horses.

RAWLINS

And we aint no goddamn wetnurses.

BLEVINS
I can look out for myself.

RAWLINS
Sure you can. Hell, you're a regular desperado. I reckon you got a gun and everthing.

BLEVINS
(pause)
I got a gun.

RAWLINS
What kind of a gun?

BLEVINS
Thirty-two twenty Colt.

RAWLINS
Bullshit. That's a rifle cartridge.
Let's see it.

Blevins looks at them a moment, then sets the plate down. He reaches into the bib of his overalls and comes out with a pistol. He rolls it in his hand with a forward flip and hands it towards Rawlins butt-first upside down.

Rawlins stares at the gun, then the boy. He looks at John Grady, who moves closer, curious. Rawlins takes the gun, turns it in his hands. Its a huge old Colt Bisley with an ejector rod. He flips open the gate, examines a shell.

RAWLINS
Where'd you get a gun like this?

BLEVINS
At the gittin place.

RAWLINS
You ever shot it?

BLEVINS
Yeah, I shot it.

RAWLINS
Can you hit anything with it?

The kid holds his hand out. Rawlins hefts the Colt in his palm, then passes it back to him.

BLEVINS
Anything you want.

RAWLINS

Bullshit.

Grinning, he looks at John Grady. John Grady smiles, shrugs.

EXT. THE DESERT NEARBY - MOMENTS LATER

Rawlins finishes pacing off a distance, then stops. He feels in his pockets for something to toss, finally pulls out his billfold. Holding it between his thumb and finger, he turns around, looking towards...

Blevins and John Grady, who are standing about fifty feet away. The kid holds the big pistol down by his leg.

RAWLINS

You ready, Annie Oakley?

BLEVINS

Waitin on you.

Rawlins gives his billfold a big underhanded heave, pitching it as high in the air as he can...

From where Blevins and John Grady are watching, the billfold looks very small against the blue sky, rising lazily towards the crest of its arc. John Grady glances curiously at the kid, who hasn't moved. Then in a blur he lifts the pistol two-handed and fires, a shockingly loud BOOM.

The billfold jerks violently sideways in midair, opens up, then falls twisting to the ground like a broken bird.

John Grady stares at Blevins as the echo of his shot fades. The kid calmly tucks the gun back into his overalls.

Rawlins, in the distance, walks across the sand, bends down for his billfold, straightens. Shoving it in his hip pocket, he stalks back towards them, tight-lipped.

RAWLINS

We better get goin.

JOHN GRADY

Let's see it.

But Rawlins walks right past them, towards the campsite, without pausing.

RAWLINS

We got to get away from this river.

John Grady looks at Blevins. Under his immense hat, the kid's dirty face remains inscrutable.

EXT. THE DESERT - DAY

In brief montage, the three boys ride over sagebrush flats... down a steep clay gully, where the bones of a dead steer are whitening... past a small estancia, where a WOMAN lifting a bucket from a well pauses to stare at them...

EXT. REFORMA, MEXICO - DAY

The boys ride single file down a cart track, looking curiously at the half dozen mud brick houses that make up this village. A few jacales with brush roofs, a pole corral with five scrubby horses. The only bystander is a goat who examines them gravely as they dismount and tie their horses at a little mud tienda with a rusty sign that says "Bebidas." They glance around before entering.

INT. THE TIENDA

A GIRL, perhaps 10, is sitting in a straightback chair reading a comic book. She looks up as the boys enter. Surprised, she puts down her comic, then crosses the packed clay floor to a plank counter, where she awaits her customers. Behind her are some shelves holding canned goods, candy, a few notions.

Rawlins takes his hat off, wiping his forehead, as John Grady smiles at the girl.

RAWLINS

She got anything to drink?

JOHN GRADY

Tiene algo que tomar?

GIRL

Si.

Atop the counter are three clay jars. She takes the tin lid from one of them, lifts up a ladle and pours off a thin brown liquid. The three boys peer at this uncertainly.

RAWLINS

What is that?

GIRL

Sidron.

Rawlins and Blevins look at John Grady.

JOHN GRADY

Cider.

RAWLINS

Let's have em. Give us three.

GIRL

Mande?

JOHN GRADY

Tres.

As the girl ladles cider into three tumblers, Blevins moves over to the window, pushing open wooden shutters to check on his horse.

Rawlins takes out his wallet, removes a dollar bill and puts it on the counter. The bill has a neat hole in it at each end. John Grady smiles as Rawlins shakes his head.

JOHN GRADY

He about deadcentered your billfold
didnt he?

Rawlins is looking through its contents, aggrieved.

RAWLINS

I want you to look at my goddamn
driver's license. And my poolhall
card.

JOHN GRADY

You won't need em down here.

RAWLINS

Look at this shit. He shot Betty
Ward right between the eyes.

The girl has finished pouring. As Blevins returns from the window, they all three lift their glasses and sip. They look at one another thoughtfully, licking their lips.

BLEVINS

You think this is some sort of cac-
tus juice or what?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. It's got a little kick
to it, dont it?

RAWLINS

I think it does.

They finish their tumblers, then Rawlins signals the girl, who pours another round.

JOHN GRADY

Better not let that youngun have no more.

BLEVINS

Shit, I've drunk whiskey. This aint nothin.

RAWLINS

Drinkin cactus juice down in old Mexico. What d'you reckon they're sayin at home about now?

JOHN GRADY

I reckon they're sayin we're gone.

Rawlins holds up his new glassful, grinning.

RAWLINS

We are, aint we?

EXT. A DIRT ROAD - DAY

John Grady sways a bit in his saddle, quite happily drunk. He raises a gourd to his lips, drinks. Overhead the sky has darkened ominously. Behind him, Rawlins bawls out a melody.

RAWLINS (O.S.)

O, bury me not on the lone praireee...

John Grady corks the gourd, then without looking tosses it over his shoulder to...

Rawlins, riding single file behind him. He makes a fumbling catch, uncorks the gourd.

RAWLINS

Where the wild coyotes will howl over meeee...

He takes a deep swig, then recorks the gourd, tossing it over his shoulder towards...

Blevins' horse, plodding along behind them. It bounces off his empty saddle.

Rawlins, puzzled by this dull thud, turns, eyeing Blevins' horse in momentary bewilderment. He pulls up Junior.

RAWLINS

Hey.

John Grady turns, stops Redbo. He peers at the empty saddle.

JOHN GRADY

Where's he at?

RAWLINS

Layin back yonder somewheres I reckon.
What the hell is wrong with him?

JOHN GRADY

He's just a kid.

EXT. SAME ROAD - FURTHER BACK

Blevins is sitting in the middle of the road as John Grady and Rawlins ride up, leading his horse by the reins. The wind is rising, snatching at their hats. Blevins laughs.

BLEVINS

Whoo! I'm drunkern shit.

RAWLINS

Can you ride or not?

BLEVINS

Hell yes I can ride. I was ridin
when I fell off.

He stands uncertainly, reeling among the horses.

BLEVINS

Let me have them reins. I'm a god-
damned buckaroo is what I am.

He grabs the reins, sawing his horse around sharply, then gets a boot in the stirrup after only two or three tries.

BLEVINS

Certified goddamn broncpeeler, what
I mean.

He lurches up and over the saddle, tumbling off on the far side of his horse. Rawlins looks at John Grady, fuming.

RAWLINS

Just leave the son of a bitch lay
there.

JOHN GRADY

Get on the goddamned horse and quit
assin around. It's fixin to come a
storm.

In towering black thunderheads on the horizon, the first
flashes of lightning glow mutely, then fade...

Blevins is on his feet again, staring towards the approach-
ing storm. He has suddenly gone pale beneath his smudges.

BLEVINS

I caint be out in this.

Rawlins laughs. He waves his hand at the empty vastness.

RAWLINS

Where do you think you're goin?

JOHN GRADY

Why cant you be out in it?

BLEVINS

On account of the lightnin.

He scrambles around, looking almost frantically for his hat.

RAWLINS

Damn if you dont look about halfway
sober all of a sudden.

JOHN GRADY

You afraid of lightnin?

BLEVINS

I'll be struck sure as the world. It
runs in the family. My grandaddy was
kilt by it. Uncle too. I got a cousin
aint but four years oldern me and it
melted all the fillings in his teeth
and soldered his jaw shut.

RAWLINS

He's gone completely dipshit.

Blevins finds his hat, tugs it on, then mounts the big bay.
The three horses wheel nervously, aware of the storm.

BLEVINS

I done been struck twice myself,
how come me to be deaf in this one
ear. I'm double bred for death by

BLEVINS (contd.)
fire. You got to get away from anything metal at all. You don't know what'll get you. Brads in your overalls. Nails in your boots.

RAWLINS
Well what do you intend to do?

BLEVINS
Try and outride it.

JOHN GRADY
You cant outride a thunderstorm.
What the hell is wrong with you?

BLEVINS
It's the only chance I got.

The first thin crack of thunder comes. Blevins stares around wildly, then doubles the reins in his fist, whacks his horse across the rump with his hat, and takes off down the road. John Grady and Rawlins watch him go, elbows flapping, growing smaller on the plain and more ludicrous yet. They look at each other, amazed.

RAWLINS
Well, if there was any doubt before
I guess that ought to clear it up.

EXT. SAME ROAD - MILES AHEAD - A SHORT TIME LATER

We PASS OVER a pitiful litter of discarded clothing, lying in the steeply descending road: a boot... then a few yards later a sock... another boot and sock... then a shirt.

John Grady and Rawlins ride along, in driving rain, following this peculiar trail. They pull up, seeing...

Blevins' horse, standing saddled by the side of the road, tied to a clump of willows. The Colt revolver is jammed into its saddlebag. An arroyo leads away from this clump. Blevins' overalls lie in the mud down there.

Rawlins turns and sits his horse in the rain and looks at John Grady, fierce with disgust. John Grady walks his horse down into the arroyo, leaving Rawlins behind.

EXT. ARROYO

Blevins crouches under the roots of a dead cottonwood, in a caveout bend of the gully. He's naked save for his hat and

an outsized pair of stained undershorts. He stares out mournfully, shivering a little, as John Grady rides up and stops, rain streaming off his hat.

JOHN GRADY

What the hell are you doin'?

BLEVINS

Just settin here.

John Grady looks back up the arroyo.

JOHN GRADY

If this rain hits hard there'll be a river come through here like a train. You thought about that?

BLEVINS

You aint never been struck by lightning. You dont know what it's like.

JOHN GRADY

You'll get drowned settin there.

BLEVINS

That's all right. I aint never been drowned before.

John Grady looks at him, a long frustrated moment.

JOHN GRADY

Well. I'll say no more.

He turns his horse away, rides back up the arroyo. Blevins, gripping his thin white shoulders in either hand, watches him go. The rain is coming harder now...

EXT. ROCK OVERHANG

Rawlins and John Grady kneel down under a rock overhang, holding their standing horses by their reins. The horses, fully exposed to the downpour, step and shake their heads. The boys stare out at the terrible storm...

Lightning flashes, thunder cracks. Rain is crashing down in sheets. Acacias whipsaw in the shrieking wind...

EXT. THE ROAD NEARBY

Blevins' horse, terrified by the noise, is bucking and rearing. Another stab of lightning, nearby. Finally he manages to yank his reins free, and with a scream of fear gallops away

across the plain...

EXT. ROCK OVERHANG

Through a thick curtain of rain, the two boys watch as the great bay flashes past them, like a ghost of a horse, before being swallowed up in the gloom. They stare at one another helplessly, as the storm rages on...

FADE TO:

EXT. THE ROAD - MORNING

Dazzling sunlight, heat. The road, washed out in the night, is now dotted with puddles. The only remaining sign of Blevins' clothing is a solitary boot. John Grady crouches, picks this up, pours out water. Rawlins is holding their horses.

RAWLINS

What do you want to do?

JOHN GRADY

I reckon we better go find his skinny ass.

RAWLINS

What if we just went on.

John Grady mounts up, looks down at Rawlins for a moment.

JOHN GRADY

I dont believe I can leave him out here afoot.

RAWLINS

Yeah. I guess not.

EXT. ARROYO

As John Grady rides slowly down the arroyo, he encounters Blevins limping up it, barefoot, in his undershorts and hat. They both stop, silently regarding each other.

JOHN GRADY

Your horse is gone.

BLEVINS

I know it. I done been out to the road already. My pistol too.

JOHN GRADY

I found this.

He tosses the boot to Blevins, who stares at it bleakly.

BLEVINS

Thanks.

JOHN GRADY

You've wore Rawlins completely out.
I reckon you know that.

BLEVINS

You never know when you'll be in
need of them you've despised.

John Grady shakes his head. A long pause. Finally he reaches down a hand. Blevins grabs it and is swung up onto Redbo, behind him.

JOHN GRADY

There's a spare shirt in my saddlebag.
Put that on before you get parboiled.

BLEVINS

I preciate it.

JOHN GRADY

Rawlins will pitch a pure hissy when
he sees you.

EXT. THE ROAD

Rawlins is sitting on Junior, waiting. He stares at Blevins as they ride up out of the arroyo, at his borrowed shirt, his skinny white legs and bare feet. Blevins stares back at him defiantly.

Rawlins is too dismayed to even speak. He shakes his head, turns his horse away sorrowfully and sets off slowly down the road.

John Grady follows. After a few moments, as they ride, Blevins pitches away his now useless boot, which lies discarded in the sand...

EXT. ENCANTADA, MEXICO - DAY

The boys ride single file down the dusty main street of a little pueblo, past the plaza, which boasts a fountain, past a distinctive bright yellow iglesia, past ancient cars and tethered horses, as children stare at them from a doorway.

John Grady suddenly straightens in his saddle, seeing...

Blevins' big Colt pistol, sticking out of the hip pocket of a MAN in the street. He is bent over the engine of a rusty green Chevrolet, intent on repairs.

Blevins, behind John Grady, has seen it too.

BLEVINS

Yonder's my goddamn pistol!

He's about to slide off the horse when John Grady reaches behind, grabbing a handful of shirt. He mutters angrily.

JOHN GRADY

Hold on, idjit.

BLEVINS

Hold on hell.

Rawlins rides up alongside, hissing at them.

RAWLINS

Keep ridin. Good God almighty.

The two horses ride on, headed out of town, as Blevins turns, staring back angrily over his shoulder...

EXT. A HILL NEAR ENCANTADA - DUSK

THROUGH BINOCULARS, we see again the rusty green Chevy. It is parked now in the weedy lot of a small house on the outskirts of the village. The BINOCULARS MOVE LEFT... past a brushwood corral, dogs lolling in the dust... finally stopping on the sashless window of an abandoned adobe ruin. After a moment the long face of Blevins' bay can be seen there as he pokes his neck out, cropping some weeds.

Rawlins looks up from the binoculars, frowning. He hands them to John Grady, who now studies the scene. The three boys are lying on the crest of a hill near a grove of cottonwoods.

BLEVINS

I aint leavin here till I get all my stuff back. My gun too.

RAWLINS

There you go. Listen at that. Get us all shot dead for horsestealin it dont mean a goddamn thing to him.

BLEVINS

It aint stealin. It's my horse.

RAWLINS
Listen, shit-for-brains -

JOHN GRADY
Yall hush. Both of you.

He lowers the binoculars. They look at him. To Blevins -

JOHN GRADY
We cant do nothin before dawn. And
then you got to play this exactly
like we say. If that dont satisfy
you then you let me know right now.

Blevins stares at the ground. A pause.

BLEVINS
Yeah. Okay.

JOHN GRADY
All right, then. Go get some sleep.
And no fire tonight.

Blevins crawls backwards, away from the crest, then rises
and slips off towards the cottonwoods. Rawlins looks tensely
at John Grady. A brief silence.

RAWLINS
Ever dumb thing I ever done in my
life there was a decision I made
before that got me into it. It was
never the dumb thing. It was always
some choice I'd made before it. You
understand what I'm sayin?

JOHN GRADY
Yeah, I think so. Meanin what?

RAWLINS
Meanin this is it. This is our last
chance. Right now. There wont be
another time and I guarantee it.

JOHN GRADY
Meanin just leave him.

RAWLINS
Yessir.

JOHN GRADY
What if it was you?

RAWLINS

I wouldnt leave you and you wouldnt leave me. That aint no argument.

JOHN GRADY

You realize the fix he's in?

RAWLINS

Yeah. I realize it. It's the one he's put hisself in.

A long silence. John Grady stares at the house. He looks at Blevins, back among the trees. Finally shakes his head.

JOHN GRADY

I cant do it.

RAWLINS

If you cant you cant. I think I knew what you'd say anyways.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah, well. I didnt.

They look at each other unhappily. A long beat.

EXT. ENCANTADA - NIGHT - BRIGHT MOONLIGHT

The sleeping pueblo and the foothills beyond...

EXT. COTTONWOOD GROVE

John Grady's hand reaches down, urgently shaking Rawlins' shoulder. They're both fully dressed. He comes awake, blinking up at John Grady, who is kneeling tensely beside him with his grandfather's Colt .45 and Rawlins' carbine.

JOHN GRADY

Wake up. Get your horse.

RAWLINS

What's wrong?

He turns, sees Blevins' empty bedroll. As he stares back wildly at John Grady, a frenzied BARKING of dogs suddenly erupts in the distance below them.

RAWLINS

That son of a bitch. That crazy son of a bitch!

EXT. ADOBE RUIN

A flock of terrified chickens explodes from the crumbling archway of the improvised stable, followed an instant later by the big bay horse, a pack of dogs yowling at his heels.

Blevins in his underwear is slung low over the horse's neck, Indian fashion, one hand clinging to its mane and the other whipping his hat against its bare back. On his face is a look of ferocious exaltation...

As the dogs leap frenziedly to nip at the horse's flanks, it skitters sideways, then turns a complete circle, maddened by fear and confusion. It sets off racing around the weedy lot, pursued by the dogs, searching for some break in the high brushwood fence. Three quick flat shots ring out, POP POP POP; angry voices are shouting in Spanish...

EXT. HILLSIDE

John Grady and Rawlins ride down the hillside towards the bedlam below, where lighted lamps are starting to appear in windows and DARK FIGURES are running. Rawlins has the rifle now, and John Grady the pistol. Their horses slide the last few yards into the road, in a cloud of dust, stagger and right themselves, before coming up short against the rotting ocotillo corral...

As their horses twist and snort in confusion, the two boys look desperately through the gloom for some gate in this fence. But before they can decide what to do...

Blevins' bay crashes through the fence in a shower of debris and pounds away down the road at an incredible speed. They catch a momentary glimpse of Blevins, his pale knees clutching the horse's shoulders, his shirttail flying, before they themselves are swarmed by the pack of baying dogs...

They wheel their squealing horses around, sawing harshly on the reins. Junior squats abruptly, digs in his hind hooves, and Rawlins is nearly thrown off backwards. He whacks the horse across the rump with the carbine, and Junior lurches upright, Rawlins spurring him. Both boys are shouting incoherently. John Grady raises his pistol, fires two quick warning shots straight into the air. Then as they set off in a hard gallop, chasing after the vanished Blevins, more shots ring out in the darkness...

EXT. THE ROAD - A MILE LATER

Blevins has turned his horse in the road, waiting. He watches John Grady and Rawlins race up to him and stop,

panting. He stares past them, back towards Encantada.

BLEVINS
Hold up. Let's listen.

RAWLINS
You son of a bitch.

Blevins ignores this, sliding down from the bay. He lays flat on the road, listening, as the others try to calm their gasping horses. Then Blevins jumps up, pulling himself onto his horse's bare back.

BLEVINS
Boys, they're a comin.

JOHN GRADY
Cars or horses?

BLEVINS
Horses. And I'll tell you right now there aint no way you all can keep up with thisn. Let me take the road since it's me they're huntin. They'll foller the dust and you all can slip off into the country. Adios, boys, until we meet again.

Before they can agree or disagree, Blevins has chucked the bay with his heels and is flying away down the moonlit road. Rawlins watches him go, then turns to John Grady.

RAWLINS
If we ever meet again, I'll kill the little son of a bitch myself.

JOHN GRADY
He's right. We better clear out.

They turn their horses into the desert and gallop away...

EXT. SAME ROAD - MINUTES LATER

The first rays of sun are just breaking over the horizon as a dark pack of HORSEMEN, perhaps ten of them in all, sweeps past in a cloud of dust, chasing after Blevins...

EXT. THE DESERT

John Grady and Rawlins are dismounted, holding their horses' muzzles to keep them quiet. They listen to the distant, receding thunder of hooves before they mount up again.

RAWLINS

You think when they come back they'll see where we quit the road?

JOHN GRADY

Not if enough of em has rode over it.

RAWLINS

You know what they'll do, they ever catch us? You thought about that?

JOHN GRADY

Let's head for them hills.

They ride on towards the mountains, which now loom closer.

EXT. A RIDGE - DAY

The two boys climb to the top of a low volcanic ridge, leaving their horses standing in a gravel wash below. Rawlins has his rifle. At the ridgeline they sprawl flat, while John Grady sweeps the distant plains with his binoculars.

JOHN GRADY

Look yonder.

RAWLINS

Where.

Two miles away RIDERS are cresting a rise. One, two. A third. Then they drop from sight again. Rawlins chambers a round.

RAWLINS

We're goin to die in this goddamned country.

JOHN GRADY

No we aint. If them mounts aint bot-tomed out I believe they'd be comin harder than that.

RAWLINS

Yeah. But ours is about done too.

JOHN GRADY

They know by now we aint got their damned horse. And this is prime snake-bite country.

RAWLINS

Thanks. You got any more good news?

JOHN GRADY
I think pretty soon they'll quit us.

RAWLINS
You really think so?

They look at each other, a brief questioning glance.

JOHN GRADY
Let's keep movin.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DUSK

The two boys huddle shivering in their saddle blankets, with their backs against a massive boulder. The horses are tied nearby amongst scraggly pines. From this steep perch they can see across twenty miles of the darkening desert, which is silent and still. Rawlins lowers the binoculars.

RAWLINS
You reckon they finally give up?

JOHN GRADY
Yeah. Probly figured we'd starve to death anyways.

RAWLINS
Like hell. It's thirst'll kill us.

John Grady manages a weary grin. A brief silence.

RAWLINS
You dont think they caught him, do you, bud?

JOHN GRADY
Blevins?

RAWLINS
Yeah.

JOHN GRADY
I dont know. I thought you was glad to get shut of him.

RAWLINS
I am. I just dont want to see nothin bad happen to him.

JOHN GRADY
I dont either.

Rawlins stares pensively out into the gathering darkness.

RAWLINS

I'll say one thing for him...

JOHN GRADY

What's that?

RAWLINS

The little son of a bitch wouldnt stand still for nobody highjackin his horse.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - DAY

Weary and dustcaked, the boys reach the crest of the cordilleras and sit their horses, staring down in surprise at the new country below...

A landscape so green and fertile that after their days in the desert it almost seems a mirage. Grasslands and marsh, flights of waterfowl, a curving stream glinting in the sun. And in the foreground - most wonderful of all - VAQUEROS are driving a great herd of cattle in a gauze of golden dust...

John Grady and Rawlins look at each other in amazement and relief. In pure joy.

EXT. THE STREAM - DAY

Riding through saddle-high grass, the boys reach the stream and leap from their horses, sprawling face down. They and their horses all drink together, happily sharing the same stretch of water. Rawlins dips his whole head in, shakes his wet hair, laughing. John Grady grins at him.

EXT. THE LUSH PLAINS - DAY

As the cattle herd grazes beyond them, a group of four or five mounted VAQUEROS - lean, good-humored men with an easy, almost insolent grace - watch the boys ride up. The boys pause a polite distance away, removing their hats as John Grady makes introductions, gestures back towards the mountains. The vaqueros react, surprised and evidently impressed. They walk their ponies forward, move slowly around the boys, nodding among themselves as they observe the boys' gear, how they sit their horses, the quality of the horses themselves. When Rawlins offers cigarettes, they accept with grateful smiles, and finally an older man among them, LUIS, their caporal, reaches out and shakes John Grady's hand.

EXT. FENCE AND ROAD

As the cattle drift homeward, strung out along a post-and-wire fence, John Grady and Rawlins ride single file with the vaqueros, helping them keep the herd hemmed in and moving. On the other side of the fence is a dirt road. John Grady looks up, sees...

A GIRL, 17, riding down this road, passing them, headed in the opposite direction. She wears English riding boots, jodhpurs, and a blue twill hacking jacket. Her horse is a black ARABIAN, wet to its belly from wading in a marsh; her boots and saddle fenders are wet as well. Under her flat-crowned hat of black felt, the girl's hair is also black; it tumbles loosely halfway to her waist...

As she passes the line of men she turns, smiles, and touches the brim of her hat with her riding crop. She is heart-breakingly beautiful...

The vaqueros touch their own hatbrims, one by one down the line, even those who are too shy to look up at her, before she pushes her horse into a faster gait and disappears down the road...

John Grady has stopped in his tracks, still staring in the direction she went. Even when Rawlins drifts back beside him, with a wondering glance, he can't pull his gaze away.

EXT. GATEWAY - DUSK

A stone-pillared gateway, spanned by elaborate ironwork, forms the main entrance to a great hacienda. The pillars are heavy with roses, and the letters in the iron tracery read "La Purisima." As WE SLOWLY ENTER this gate, the long arch-lined ramadas and red-tiled roofs of the ranchhouse loom before us, surrounded by its gardens and outbuildings, barns and corrals and fences. A cloud of dust hovers over one of the distant corrals...

EXT. CORRAL - HOLDINGPEN

The ranch's gerente, ARMANDO, a stocky man in his 50s, stands with one boot up on a fencerrail, picking his teeth. He watches carefully, critically, as...

John Grady and Rawlins move back and forth on their horses in the dusty twilight, now wheeling, now reining back, expertly driving the last of the cattle into a holdingpen. Rawlins bends down from Junior to swing the gate closed.

Armando looks at the caporal, Luis, who is leaning against

the fence next to him. Luis grins proudly.

INT. THE GERENTE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

At a metal table, under a bare lightbulb, the gerente gravely extends a ledger towards Rawlins and John Grady, as Luis looks on. The boys sign their names in ink, one after the other. Then Armando rises, smiling, and shakes their hands. Luis claps them on the back.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - MESS HALL - NIGHT

In a tin-roofed bunkhouse with concrete floors, John Grady and Rawlins sit on benches at a long table, surrounded by a dozen vaqueros. They're all eating beans and tortillas and stew, and drinking cerveza from longnecked bottles. Everyone seems to be happily talking at once, gesturing, smiling, welcoming the newcomers. The air is thick with tobacco smoke, and there's music from someone's radio...

INT. BUNKHOUSE - BUNK ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dimly lit, squares of moonlight through its small dirty windows, as we pass down a row of bunks, each with its sleeping vaquero...

At the end of the room, the boys are lying in their underwear on a pair of adjacent narrow cots, just thin ticking over rusty springs. Despite their exhaustion, they're too happy to shut their eyes. Rawlins looks across, whispers.

RAWLINS

Hey, bud? I believe these are some good old boys.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. I believe they are too.

RAWLINS

This is real cowboyin, aint it? Just like it was for the old waddies.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. Go to sleep.

Rawlins is silent for a few moments. The cattle can be heard outside, lowing gently.

RAWLINS

Bud?

JOHN GRADY

Yeah?

RAWLINS

How long do you reckon you'd like to stay here?

JOHN GRADY

(smiles)

About a hundred years. Go to sleep.

Rawlins grins. And is sleeping the moment his eyes close.

EXT. LA PURISIMA - DAY

Five MEN in elegant hunting clothes trot their horses toward the gateway, leaving the hacienda. They're accompanied by a retinue of mounted SERVANTS and a stream of eager greyhounds. As they pass the gerente's house, he emerges onto his porch. One of the riders, ROCHA, 47, a tall, broadshouldered man with graying hair, separates from the group, which pauses. He rides over to speak to Armando.

JOHN GRADY (O.S.)

Don Héctor Rocha y Villareal. Owns this whole shebang. Twenty-seven thousand acres...

EXT. HOLDINGPEN

Rawlins whistles. The boys have paused in their work, kneeling in the dust beside a squirming calf, its hooves lashed together. Rawlins holds a branding iron. They watch Rocha giving brief instructions. Armando nods respectfully.

JOHN GRADY

Flies his own plane back and forth to Mexico City, where his wife stays. Luis says this ranch's been in his family for a hundred and seventy years.

The gerente touches his hat. Rocha turns away, riding back to his friends, then the entire retinue moves on, passing the boys in their pen before finally trotting out the gate.

RAWLINS

What do you reckon they're huntin'?

JOHN GRADY

I'd guess coyotes.

RAWLINS

Damn. I'd sure like to see that...
You think that was his daughter we
seen yesterday?

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. I'd say it was.

Something in his voice makes Rawlins look at him curiously.
Their calf kicks in the dust, struggling.

JOHN GRADY

You ready here?

Rawlins brands the calf, which bawls briefly before John
Grady unlashes its hooves in one swift, expert motion. It
rises unsteadily, regains its balance, runs away.

EXT. BUNKHOUSE RAMADA - DUSK

John Grady and Rawlins emerge from the bunkhouse, sipping
tin cups of coffee. Vaqueros can be seen through the screen
door, still eating. A distant commotion - the squeals of
horses, the pounding of hooves - draws their attention...

A low cloud of dust hangs over one of the distant corrals,
and dark shapes can be seen flashing through it...

EXT. CORRAL

A small herd of mustangs - wild three year old colts - is
careening nervously around the corral. Roans, duns, bays,
a few paints, of varied sizes and conformations, all wheel-
ing and snorting, eyes wide with fright...

Rawlins and John Grady are climbing onto the fence to get
a better look at them. They sit on the top rail.

JOHN GRADY

These just come in. They say the
old man's got somethin like four hun-
dred mustangs up on that mesa.

RAWLINS

That's as spooky a bunch of horses
as I ever saw.

JOHN GRADY

They dont know what we are.

RAWLINS

Dont know what we are?

JOHN GRADY

I dont think so. I dont think they've
ever seen a man afoot.

He drops down lightly inside the corral, and the horses go even crazier, swirling and bunching at the far end. Some shy at the fence, others try to climb over each other. John Grady studies them admiringly. After a few moments Rawlins drops down beside him, a little more reluctantly.

RAWLINS

You see anything there you'd have?

JOHN GRADY

There's horses there.

RAWLINS

Where at?

JOHN GRADY

Look at that dark bay. Right yonder.
Look at the hindquarters on him. He'd
make a cowhorse. Look at that roan.

RAWLINS

Maybe. They got one thing goin for
em, anyway.

JOHN GRADY

What's that.

RAWLINS

They aint had no Mexican to try and
break em yet. They'll use them damn
ringbits and end up with coldjawed
sons of bitches too mean to ride.

John Grady nods, studies the horses.

JOHN GRADY

How many are there?

RAWLINS

I make it fifteen. No, sixteen.

JOHN GRADY

You think you and me could break all
of em in four days?

Rawlins looks at him, surprised.

RAWLINS

Depends on what you call broke.

JOHN GRADY

Just halfway decent greenbroke horses.
Double and stop and stand still to be
saddled.

Rawlins pushes his hat back. He studies the mustangs again,
doubtfully, then looks at John Grady.

RAWLINS

Why four days?

JOHN GRADY

You think we could do it?

RAWLINS

You'd be a woreout sumbuck. I'll
tell you that.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. But think how good you'd sleep.

As he looks at John Grady's cocky smile, Rawlins can't help
breaking into a grin himself.

INT. THE GERENTE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Armando looks up in surprise from his stack of ledgers. The
boys stand before him, hats in their hands.

ARMANDO

Amansadores.

JOHN GRADY

Si.

ARMANDO

Ambos.

JOHN GRADY

Si. Hay dieciseis caballos en el po-
trero. Podemos amansarlos en cuatro
dias.

The gerente leans back, studies them. He drums his fingers
on the metal table top.

EXT. THE YARD - NIGHT

The boys are walking away from the gerente's porch, back to-

wards the bunkhouse.

RAWLINS

What did he say?

JOHN GRADY

He said we were full of shit. But in a nice way.

INT. CORRAL - DAWN

Rawlins and John Grady approach the corral carrying forty-foot maguery catchropes coiled over their shoulders, saddle blankets, a riding hackamore with a metal noseband, and John Grady's Hamley saddle with its stirrups shortened. Two or three vaqueros are drifting along after them, sipping their morning coffee, ready to be entertained. Rawlins mutters.

RAWLINS

We mess this up, bud, its goin to be a long ride back to Texas.

JOHN GRADY

Ride, hell.

When the boys reach the gate, we see stacked on the ground there many more coils of rope, of assorted sizes and materials, along with a pile of hand-fashioned rope hackamores. Rawlins lifts the wire loop and opens the gate and the two of them go inside, closing the gate behind them.

The mustangs shift and stir at the far end of the corral, eyeing the boys suspiciously...

John Grady sets down his saddle and catchrope then squats to adjust the hackamore. Rawlins stands building his catch-loop. He has a pile of sideropes slung around his neck.

RAWLINS

We goin to bust these varmints twice?

JOHN GRADY

What for?

RAWLINS

Cause I never seen one yet that completely believed it the first time. Or ever doubted it the second.

JOHN GRADY

I'll make em believe. You'll see.

RAWLINS

I'm goin to tell you right now, cousin. This is a heathenish bunch.

JOHN GRADY

Then let her rip.

Rawlins steps forward with his catchloop. At his approach the horses move skittishly along the fence. As the first one breaks away from the herd, Rawlins rolls his loop and fore-foots the colt, which hits the ground with a tremendous thump. The other horses flare and bunch wildly.

Before it can struggle up, John Grady has run to the animal, squatting on its neck. He pulls its head up and to one side, holding the horse by its muzzle with its face against his chest, its nostrils flaring. The huge wet eyes roll in terror, staring into his from inches away. He cups his hand, stroking over the eyes, and all the while murmuring into the horse's ear in a low, steady, comforting voice.

JOHN GRADY

Está bien. Está bien... No hay peligro, entiende...? Está bien. De acuerdo. Eres muy guapo. Muy fuerte y valiente...

Working swiftly, as John Grady continues to murmur, Rawlins has dropped a slipnoose around the pastern of a hind leg, then halfhitched that to a foreleg. Now he frees the catchrope, tosses it away, then takes the hackamore and slips it over the horse's muzzle and ears. John Grady runs his thumb into the animal's mouth and Rawlins fits the mouthrope, then slipnooses a second siderope to the other rear leg. Then he clips both sideropes to the hackamore. He looks up.

RAWLINS

You all set?

JOHN GRADY

All set.

John Grady lets go of the horse's head and both boys step quickly away. The horse struggles up, turns, shoots out a hind foot, snatches itself in a half circle, then falls down. It gets up, kicks again, falls down again...

The vaqueros exchange glances at this curious procedure...

The colt gets up again, snorting, hopping up and down in a furious dance, snatching its head about, then finally pausing to glare at the boys.

RAWLINS

These sumbucks are as crazy as a
shithouse rat.

JOHN GRADY

You pick out the one you think is
craziest and I'll give you a finished
horse this time Sunday week.

RAWLINS

(grins)

Bullshit.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE SAME - MIDMORNING

By now there are a dozen vaqueros standing along the fence,
all watching with keen interest as...

John Grady jumps away from another horse's neck; the colt
lurches to his feet, tries to kick him, falls down. Half of
the horses are now hobbled, while the other half race and
scatter in a rising sea of dust...

FADE TO:

EXT. THE SAME - NOON

The crowd of spectators has swelled to thirty or more, and
now includes women and children as well. More people are
drifting up from the direction of the hacienda's gate, some
of them even carrying blankets and picnic supplies...

The sixteenth and final horse has now been sidelined. The
mustangs make a strange spectacle, scattered about the corral
facing in every direction, exhausted but still furiously
wary. Pounding dust from his hat, Rawlins eyes the crowd.

RAWLINS

Word sure gets around when the cir-
cus comes to town, dont it?

John Grady smiles. He's studying the horses.

JOHN GRADY

You picked one out yet?

RAWLINS

Yeah. For pure crazy I nominate that
bucketheaded son of a bitch standin
right yonder.

The colt in question is a big, wild-eyed PAINT, still giving fierce little twitches and kicks...

John Grady shakes his head ruefully: a tough challenge. But he walks over to this horse and ties a twelve-foot mecate rope to its hackamore. Then he tugs the limping, slightly resisting horse out through the gate, as vaqueros open it. Rawlins follows, carrying the saddle, a blanket, and some hobbleropes. The crowd makes way as the boys take the horse into an adjacent, empty corral, closing its gate behind them. All the spectators shift excitedly to this new arena.

While John Grady holds the horse's head, whispering to it, Rawlins kneels, hobbles the front legs together. Then he takes the mecate rope, stands back. John Grady unbuttons his shirt, damp with sweat, and pulls it off, leaving only his tee shirt. Then he gently rubs the horse's head and face with his shirt, giving it his scent, whispering to it all the while, passing the shirt over its neck and shoulders, then down its face again, caressing it like a lover.

The crowd is watching intently. By now there must be sixty people. Fathers hold up babies so they can see better...

Rawlins glances from the crowd back to John Grady.

RAWLINS

What good do you think it does to
waller all over a horse thataway?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. I aint a horse.

John Grady stoops for the blanket, places it on the horse's back, smoothes it gently, still whispering. Then he bends down for the saddle, sets it on the blanket, rocking it into place. The horse gives one violent shiver, but otherwise is still. John Grady reaches under, pulls up the strap and cinches it. The horse's ears go flat, but John Grady leans against it, still whispering, stroking. Then he hauls up on the cinchstrap again, buckles it.

JOHN GRADY

All right.

RAWLINS

Hold him.

John Grady holds the mecate while Rawlins reties the sideropes from the hackamore to the front hobbles. Then together they slip the hackamore off the colt's head, replacing it with a bosalea, gently fitting the mouthrope and headstall.

John Grady drops the stirrups, gathers the reins, loops them over the horse's head. Rawlins looks at him. He nods tensely.

Rawlins kneels, undoes the hobbles and pulls the slipnooses until the sideropes fall to the ground at the horse's rear hooves. Then he steps away quickly.

John Grady takes a deep breath. He puts one foot in the stirrup and presses himself flat against the horse's shoulder, whispering to it. Then he swings up into the saddle.

The entire crowd is hushed with anticipation...

For a moment the horse is stock still. Then it shoots out one hindfoot. A tense pause. Then it throws itself sideways, twisting and kicking, before stopping again with a puzzled snort. John Grady leans down, whispering, then touches its ribs with his bootheels and the horse steps forward. He reins it and it turns obediently, shaking its head a bit.

The crowd makes a sort of collective sigh, though whether of appreciation or disappointment would be hard to say...

As John Grady, grinning, turns the horse again and rides it back past Rawlins, Rawlins spits in disgust.

RAWLINS

What the hell kind of bronc is that?
You think that's what these people
paid good money to see?

JOHN GRADY

Shoot. These're gonna be easy.

EXT. THE SAME - MONTAGE

John Grady, thrown, hits the dirt with an awful thump. The crowd groans, then there is a scattering of applause, some whistles, as he gets to his feet again... Then Rawlins is thrown... Then John Grady again, stumbling through the dust before dropping woozily to his knees... Then Rawlins again, rising to wipe the blood from his lips... We see **FACES** in the crowd, excited, eager, now roaring happily, now wincing at some new setback...

FADE TO:

EXT. THE SAME - NIGHT

By the light of a huge bonfire and many lanterns, John Grady is riding a final mustang, which rears and twists and kicks. Somehow he hangs on, the crowd cheering him like a rodeo

performer, until finally the horse stops bucking and stands still, trembling. John Grady drops down from the saddle, sagging in exhaustion as his boots hit the ground. Rawlins is there to lend him an arm, and the two of them limp weakly towards the gate, which someone opens. At the gate they pause, looking back over the corral...

The wild and frantic herd of mustangs they faced at dawn no longer exists. Now sixteen half-broken horses stand quietly, or step slowly about trailing their hackamore ropes, with only an occasional puzzled whinny in the darkness.

As the boys turn, filthy with dust, sweat and scabbed cuts, to make their way through the crowd, it parts for them respectfully. There are over a hundred people by now, smiling, eyes shining in the firelight. Someone is playing a guitar, and as they limp along, nearly asleep on their feet, CHILDREN reach to touch them, or to keep them from falling, and MEN, utter strangers, offer them drinks from bottles of mescal...

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

In the empty kitchen, the music and voices from outside can still be heard. John Grady is sagging at the supper table, staring dully into his mug, as Rawlins totters over from the stove with two plates of beans and tortillas. He sits, wincing at the hard bench, and peers at his friend.

RAWLINS

You aint tired are you, bud?

John Grady's voice is a husky croak.

JOHN GRADY

No. I was tired five hours ago.

Rawlins grins through cracked lips.

RAWLINS

Well dont drink no more of that coffee. It'll keep you awake.

EXT. THE CORRAL - NEXT DAY

John Grady is riding the first mustang again, the paint, which shies and snorts as they approach the gate. He pats its shoulder, leaning down to whisper in its ear, then prods it with his bootheels until it moves forward again.

JOHN GRADY

Open her up.

Today there are only a dozen or so ONLOOKERS, mostly vaqueros, gathered near Rawlins at the gate. He looks up nervously.

RAWLINS

Let me saddle a catch-horse.

JOHN GRADY

We aint got time.

RAWLINS

If that son of a bitch sets your ass out in them stickers you'll have time.

JOHN GRADY

I guess I better stay in the saddle then.

Rawlins finally relents, opens the gate. John Grady prods the paint again and it bursts forward through the opening, John Grady heading it towards the open plains as Rawlins and the Mexicans watch them diminish...

EXT. THE PLAINS - MOVING ANGLE

The paint gallops through high, lush grass, John Grady riding easily and well, giving the horse its head. When he finally reins up, the horse stops with little resistance and stands panting. He leans from the saddle, patting the horse's neck, stroking it and whispering into its ear. Then he prods it and they ride on...

EXT. CIENAGA ROAD - MOVING ANGLE

John Grady is riding past high sedge and stands of willow, beside a laguna, when he hears another horse approaching at a trot from behind him. Before he can turn his head the trot has changed to a brisk walk and the girl is suddenly alongside him, on her black Arabian, not five feet away...

She turns her blue eyes to look at him, full in the face, and she nods, or perhaps only lowers her head slightly to see what horse he's riding...

John Grady opens his mouth, but no words will come...

She looks at him again, with something close to a smile, her eyes flashing, then she passes by, superbly erect in her saddle, her horse changing gaits again, until horse and rider both disappear beyond the lakeside willows.

John Grady sits on his mustang, stopped in the road, looking after her. Those eyes have altered his world forever, in the space of a heartbeat, and he knows it...

EXT. THE CORRAL - DUSK - TWO NIGHTS LATER

Armando, picking his teeth, stands inside the fence next to John Grady and Rawlins. They are all watching as...

Luis, the caporal, rides one of the newly-broken mustangs around the corral. He rides unsparingly, sawing the horse back and forth then pulling it up short before jumping down from the saddle. He crosses to the gerente, nods. The two of them look over the other horses, standing docile in the far wing of the corral. Then they look at the two boys, as if still not quite certain whether to believe their own eyes.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - DAY

A red Cessna circles the ranch buildings, then banks and glides down for a landing on a grassy airstrip nearby, where Armando stands waiting by a Jeep...

INT. THE HACIENDA KITCHEN - DAY

John Grady, wearing his best jeans and a clean shirt, with his hair neatly combed, stands holding his hat. The kitchen is big, well-equipped. A WOMAN washes dishes at the sink, and a MAN at the table is rubbing knives with an oilstone. Neither one speaks to him; a few moments of self-conscious silence before Rocha himself appears in the doorway, stands looking at John Grady.

ROCHA

Buenos dias.

He steps forward and they shake hands.

JOHN GRADY

Buenos dias.

ROCHA

Maria. Café por favor.

He holds out his hand palm upward toward the doorway, and John Grady crosses the kitchen and enters the hall.

INT. HALLWAY

As they walk down the hallway, side by side, John Grady glances around. The house is cool and quiet, high-ceilinged, with glazed tiles on the floor. They pass a longcase clock, ticking softly, straightbacked antique chairs, lovely floral arrangements. As they pass the open double doors of a library, he catches a momentary glimpse of...

A woman sitting in a wingchair with a book on her lap. The DUENA ALFONSA, 72, wears a dark gray skirt and a white pleated blouse, with gray hair gathered up behind her elegant, beautiful head. Her eyes meet John Grady's, just for a moment; they are alert and shrewd like a bird's. Then she passes from view as the men continue walking...

INT. DINING ROOM

Beneath walls of blue damask and many portraits of men and of horses, John Grady and Rocha sit at a long walnut table. Rocha offers a tin of cigarettes, and the boy accepts one.

JOHN GRADY

Gracias.

Rocha lights John Grady's cigarette with a silver lighter, then one for himself.

ROCHA

Bueno. We can speak English.

He blows out a thin stream of smoke, smiles.

ROCHA

Armando tells me that you understand horses.

JOHN GRADY

I've been around em some.

Rocha nods, smoking thoughtfully. The male servant enters from the kitchen with a silver coffee service. He sets it on the table and silently departs. Rocha pours coffee for two.

ROCHA

You are from Texas.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. San Angelo.

Rocha nods, pushing a cup towards John Grady. He sips from his own, still considering the boy.

ROCHA

Why are you here?

John Grady looks at him. He looks down the table to the bright window; three cats are sunning themselves outside on the sill. He looks back at the hacendado.

JOHN GRADY
I just wanted to see the country, I
reckon. Or we did.

ROCHA
May I ask how old you are?

JOHN GRADY
Sixteen.

Don Hector raises an eyebrow.

ROCHA
Sixteen.

JOHN GRADY
Yessir.

ROCHA
When I was sixteen I told people I
was eighteen. Your friend is sixteen
also?

JOHN GRADY
Seventeen.

ROCHA
But you are the leader.

JOHN GRADY
We dont have no leaders. We're just
buddies.

ROCHA
Of course.

He tips some ash into a china ashtray. John Grady waits.

ROCHA
I have recently purchased a thorough-
bred stallion, of excellent blood. He
is enroute.

JOHN GRADY
He's where?

ROCHA
(smiles)
Enroute. From Mexico City. He has been
standing at stud.

JOHN GRADY

You intend to raise racehorses?

ROCHA

No. I intend to raise quarterhorses.

JOHN GRADY

To use here on the ranch?

ROCHA

Yes. I am thinking of breeding this stallion to my mestefio mares. What is your opinion?

JOHN GRADY

I've known it done. There's been some good cowhorses sired out of thoroughbreds.

ROCHA

How much importance do you give to the mare?

JOHN GRADY

Same as the sire. In my opinion.

ROCHA

Most breeders place more confidence in the horse.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. They do.

Rocha considers this answer for a moment. Then nods.

ROCHA

I happen to agree with you. Tell me about my mares.

JOHN GRADY

There's a few of em right good, the rest I'd pretty much call scrubs. Spanish ponies, what we used to call em. Old Barb stock. They're small and a little on the light side and they dont have the hindquarters you'd want in a cuttinghorse, but you can still rope off of em, if you...

He stops, looks at his hat on the table. He looks up at Rocha, who smiles.

JOHN GRADY
I aint tellin you nothin you dont
already know.

ROCHA
Do you know what a criollo is?

JOHN GRADY
Yessir. That's a Argentine horse.

ROCHA
Do you know who Sam Jones was?

JOHN GRADY
I do if you're talkin about a horse.

ROCHA
Crawford Sykes?

JOHN GRADY
That's another of Uncle Billy Anson's
horses. I heard about that horse all
my life.

ROCHA
My father bought horses from Mr. Anson.

JOHN GRADY
Uncle Billy and my granddaddy were
friends. They were born within three
days of each other. When those old
men would get to talkin horses, I
used to hang on ever word.

Rocha smiles. He leans back in his chair, studying him.

ROCHA
And you rode here from Texas. You
and your friend.

JOHN GRADY
Yessir.

ROCHA
Just the two of you.

John Grady hesitates. He likes this man and doesn't want to
lie to him.

JOHN GRADY
Yessir. Just me and him.

Rocha nods, stubbing out his cigarette. He pushes his chair back, rising. He smiles at John Grady.

ROCHA

Come, Mr. Cole. Let us look at some horses.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - DAY

The two boys sit opposite on their bunks, elbows on their knees, leaning forward, looking at their folded hands. John Grady finally speaks, after a silence, without looking up.

JOHN GRADY

If you dont want me to do it I wont.
I'll stick right here.

RAWLINS

It aint like you was goin off someplace.

JOHN GRADY

No. We'd still be workin together,
mostly. Bringin in mustangs and all.

Rawlins nods. John Grady watches him.

JOHN GRADY

But you just say the word and I'll
tell him no.

RAWLINS

Aint no reason to. It's a opportunity
for you. Hell I'd do it.

There is another brief silence. They look at each other.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Leading Redbo by his bridlereins, with all his gear packed on the horse, John Grady approaches an English-style barn. It is white and handsome, bordered by neat flowerbeds and gravel walks. It has painted shutters and a cupola.

At the open bay an old groom, ESTEBAN, is sweeping. He pauses to study the horse, and only then looks at the boy.

JOHN GRADY

Hola, qué tal está?

The old man turns back to his work without comment. John Grady hesitates, then leads Redbo past him into the cool dark barn.

INT. BARN - 2ND FLOOR

Carrying his saddlebags, John Grady opens a door, steps inside and stands looking at his new room...

A cot, neatly made. A washstand, with folded towels and washcloths and soap. A dresser, oval mirror, and a wooden chair. A window looks out to the paddocks and the hacienda in the distance. A simple, functional room, but compared to the bunkhouse it seems almost opulent.

John Grady smiles.

INT. BARN - 1ST FLOOR

John Grady bounds down the stairs, swings into the main passage, and nearly runs straight into...

The girl, who stands with her back to him. Estéban is tightening the cinch on her black Arabian. She turns, looks at John Grady.

JOHN GRADY

Buenas tardes.

GIRL

You can speak.

Her eyes sparkle. Her English is good but a bit diligent, learned mostly from schoolbooks.

JOHN GRADY

Yes ma'am.

She slides her fingers under the strap to check it.

GIRL

And I already know you can ride.

She passes the reins over the horse's head and puts her foot in the stirrup and stands up into the saddle. She looks down at him, smiling.

GIRL

But can you dance?

John Grady is surprised. He looks at her, then glances at the groom. The old man's face is blank.

GIRL

He has no English. And you will have to be quicker than that if you want

GIRL (contd.)
to keep up with me.

She turns her horse and rides down between the stalls and out into the sunlight, as he stares after her.

EXT. GRANGE HALL - LA VEGA - NIGHT

On the outskirts of a neighboring village is a large adobe grange. Paper lanterns decorate the nearby trees. Mariache music floats out of the open double doors, where a MAN sits selling tickets. YOUNG PEOPLE, mostly teenaged boys but also a few couples, drift towards this doorway from the sandy parking area nearby...

John Grady and Rawlins are tethering their horses to a fence where others are already tied. They're wearing new checked shirts and stiff new canvas pants. They walk towards the music, passing parked cars, pickups, wagons, some with BOYS leaning against them, laughing and sharing bottles.

RAWLINS
You say she goes to school in Mexico City?

JOHN GRADY
Yeah.

RAWLINS
How old is she?

JOHN GRADY
Seventeen. It's some kind of fancy prep school or somethin.

RAWLINS
Well she's a fancy sort of girl.

JOHN GRADY
No she aint.

Rawlins glances at him, as John Grady pauses to adjust the rake of his hat. Rawlins shakes his head.

RAWLINS
I hope you aint gettin no crazy ideas. She probably dates guys got their own airplanes, let alone cars.

JOHN GRADY
Yeah. You're probably right.

RAWLINS

What's her name, anyway?

JOHN GRADY

Alejandra...

For him even the word is charged with magic.

JOHN GRADY

Her name is Alejandra.

INT. GRANGE

The big floor has pockets of seeds underfoot and drifts of straw, and it is crowded with swirling young DANCERS. At the far end a small BAND labors on a stage of grainpallets; their footlights are set in fruitcans covered with tinted cellophane...

John Grady and Rawlins make their way along one wall, where other BOYS and MEN are watching the action. Once or twice they nod, recognizing familiar faces from the ranch. Finding an open spot they tuck themselves in, looking out at...

A similar file of GIRLS against the opposite wall, smiling, giggling, turned out in their prettiest dresses. The crowd seems to be a relaxed mixture of social classes.

John Grady is searching the dancers, till his gaze finds...

Alejandra, dancing with a TALL BOY in a jacket and tie. She wears a blue dress and her lips are red. As she turns, her eyes sweep across his. Her hair is done up in a blue ribbon. When she turns again she smiles at him.

John Grady smiles back at her...

On the bandstand the ACCORDION PLAYER struggles to the end of his solo, and a TRUMPETER, much more accomplished, steps forward for his own...

John Grady moves away from the wall, as Rawlins watches, and eases between couples until he reaches her. When he taps the tall boy on the shoulder the boy looks first at him in surprise, then at Alejandra, who nods. The boy gives way, reluctantly, and John Grady steps forward, slips his hand around her slim waist, and they begin to dance. She looks up at him with great forthrightness, then smiles. Then she puts her face against his shoulder. His own face is suffused with wonder, with shy happiness...

As the tempo slows, becomes more dreamlike, the trumpeter

is playing long, sustained notes of piercing beauty...

Moths flicker around the overhead strings of bulbs, which are decorated with painted paper bags...

John Grady and Alejandra turn gently under these lights, moving with a natural grace like longtime partners.

ALEJANDRA

I'm glad that you came.

JOHN GRADY

Did you not think I would?

She tosses her head back and looks at him, smiling. Her eyes gleam in the lights. Her skin is as pale as porcelain.

ALEJANDRA

Al contrario. I knew you would.

EXT. THE ROAD NEARBY - MOONLIGHT

As they walk along the road, taking the night air, she slips her arm through his. Other couples stroll nearby, sipping lemonade from paper cones.

JOHN GRADY

My grandfather lived his whole life
on that ranch. Seventy-four years.
It got to seem like there couldnt
ever be one without the other.

ALEJANDRA

But that was your birthright.

She turns, stopping him.

ALEJANDRA

How will you live now? Where will
your home be?

He doesn't know how to answer. He looks into her eyes. Then he reaches out, gently touches her hair. They look at one another silently.

EXT. WATERTROUGH

They sit next to each other on a low concrete watertrough. The grange is behind them. Her shoes are in her lap, her naked feet crossed in the dust. With her fingertips she traces patterns in the dark water.

ALEJANDRA

I cannot imagine my life without La Purisima. My mother becomes angry with me because I always want to come here. She says that I prefer my father to her.

JOHN GRADY

Do you?

ALEJANDRA

Si. But that is not why I come. Anyway, she says I will change my mind.

JOHN GRADY

About coming here?

ALEJANDRA

About everything. She and Alfonsa conspire against my freedom. They wont be satisfied until I am as bitter and lonely as themselves.

JOHN GRADY

Who is Alfonsa?

ALEJANDRA

My great aunt. She lives at the hacienda.

JOHN GRADY

I think I've seen her.

Alejandra seems to shiver. The music starts up again, inside, and they turn to look that way. She stands and bends with one hand on his shoulder to slip on her shoes.

ALEJANDRA

Come, I will introduce you to my friends. You will like Lucia. She is very pretty.

JOHN GRADY

I bet she aint as pretty as you.

She backs away towards the grange, still smiling at him.

ALEJANDRA

Oh my. You must be careful what you say. Besides, it is not true. She is prettier.

She laughs, turning, and walks happily towards the music. He rises and follows her...

FADE TO:

EXT. LA PURISIMA - MAIN GATE - DAY

A long silver horsetrailer, towed behind a pickup truck, makes a slow turn off the road and enters the gate...

EXT. BARNYARD

Rocha, Armando, John Grady, Estéban and a pair of vaqueros watch as the trailer backs towards them, stops. The cowboys lower its ramp, then one springs up inside.

Rocha looks at John Grady, who is waiting eagerly...

Down the ramp walks Rocha's prized breeding STALLION, led on a rope by the vaquero. The stallion is a rich deep red, sixteen hands high, well muscled and heavily boned. He wears a padded blanket and traveling boots...

John Grady's eyes widen at his first sight of this magnificent animal. Rocha enjoys his reaction.

The horse is skittish, tossing his head, stepping nervously. The others watch as John Grady walks directly to the stallion, leans against him.

JOHN GRADY

Caballo padre... Soy comandante
de las yeguas. Yo y yo sólo...

He walks all around the horse examining and rubbing him, whispering in Spanish. The horse calms down quickly, pushing his face against John Grady's chest, nickering...

Rocha and Armando exchange a glance. Rocha smiles.

ROCHA

Le gusta?

John Grady backs away from the horse, staring in wonder. He looks at Rocha, nods.

JOHN GRADY

That's a hell of a horse.

INT./EXT. LA PURISIMA - MONTAGE

In the barn, John Grady comes to the stallion's stall. The

horse moves forward eagerly to greet him. As he holds an apple for the horse to eat, he rubs its face, talking to it. Estéban, oiling a saddle nearby, watches this interplay with grudging approval...

Rocha and John Grady, in a corral, watch as four mares are led around them in a wide circle, a vaquero at each mare's head. The boy points to one of the mares, gesturing to indicate something he likes about its conformation. Rocha moves a few feet away for a different angle of view, studying the mare, then looks at John Grady, nods...

The old groom is eating supper alone, in his dark little kitchen, when he looks up, surprised. John Grady, standing in his doorway, holds up two longnecked cervezas. Estéban looks at him for a long moment before finally nodding, then gruffly indicates the empty chair across from him...

John Grady holds the stallion by its lead rope against a teasing board. As Estéban leads a mare up to the other side of the fence, the stallion lifts his muzzle across the fence top, sniffing the mare, then arches his neck, tries to bite her. His hooves pound at the board, splinters flying off, in a frightening display of strength and sexuality...

The stallion is covering a mare. His face is against her shoulder, his teeth bared. She lifts her head, eyes wide. The muscles of his great neck and back ripple beneath his gleaming skin, froth drips from his muzzle. John Grady is beside him, holding his reins, steadying him with one hand against his ribs. Rocha is steadying the mare. His eyes meet John Grady's and he smiles...

John Grady rides the stallion out through the gate of the hacienda, the horse prancing almost sideways, arching his neck, the boy laughing, excited at the sheer power of this animal...

In the hacienda, in Don Héctor's study, Rocha and John Grady sit with piles of breeding ledgers, genealogies, an anatomical chart of a horse. Rocha is pointing to something on a genealogical tree, explaining, and the boy nods his understanding. Don Héctor looks at him with something very like a father's pride and affection...

A gang of vaqueros are repairing a stretch of rail fence. As John Grady flashes by them on the stallion, Rawlins looks up, sees him. For a long moment he stares after his vanishing friend, before finally turning back to work...

EXT. CIENEGA ROAD - EVENING

John Grady is riding the stallion, bareback, along the dirt road that verges the marshland. Horse and rider are both lathered with sweat, dripping. He pulls up on the hackamore reins, stopping as he sees...

Alexandra approaching on the black Arabian. As she nears him she stops, sitting her horse. They look at each other in silence. The stallion trembles, stepping about in the road, slinging its head in a froth from side to side. She looks at the stallion, then back at John Grady.

ALEJANDRA

I want to ride him.

JOHN GRADY

What?

ALEJANDRA

I want to ride him.

JOHN GRADY

When?

ALEJANDRA

Now. I want to ride him now.

JOHN GRADY

He dont have a saddle on.

ALEJANDRA

Yes. I know.

He looks out across the marsh, troubled, then back at her.

JOHN GRADY

I dont know if the patrón would
want you to ride him. Your father.

She smiles at him, a pitying smile, then steps to the ground, holding the Arabian's reins.

ALEJANDRA

Get down.

JOHN GRADY

Are you sure about this?

ALEJANDRA

Yes. Hurry.

He slides to the ground, stands looking at her.

JOHN GRADY
What about your horse?

ALEJANDRA
I want you to take him back to the
barn for me.

JOHN GRADY
Somebody will see me.

She comes forward, takes the hackamore reins from him. They stare into each other's eyes. Their faces are almost touching. She puts a hand on his shoulder. His heart is pounding. After a long moment he bends before her, making a stirrup of his laced fingers. She puts her boot into his hands and he lifts her onto the stallion. She gathers the reins, looking down at him. He can barely breathe.

JOHN GRADY
You're fixin to get me in trouble.

ALEJANDRA
You are in trouble.

She looks down at him for another moment, then boots the stallion forward and goes loping down the road along the edge of the lake. He stands looking after her.

EXT. THE BARN - NIGHT

From a distance, the barn is silent; the upstairs windows are dark...

Walking as quietly as he can, John Grady leads the Arabian down an outside wall, pausing at the corner to listen. He hears nothing but the soft stirrings of other horses. Finally he leads the Arabian into the barn...

INT. THE BARN

John Grady softly puts Alejandra's saddle into its place on the rack, hangs her bridle in a row of others. He backs away trying to see if he's covered all his tracks. Then, still uneasy, he goes to the bottom of the staircase, listens for another long beat, then disappears up the steps.

At the far end of the passage, Esteban steps out of the shadows, looking at the black Arabian in his stall. Then he turns, staring bleakly up towards John Grady's room...

INT. THE HACIENDA - LATE THE NEXT DAY

John Grady, wearing his new shirt and canvas pants and carrying his hat, walks down the familiar corridor. Outside the library doors he hesitates for a moment, then enters.

INT. LIBRARY

The Dueña Alfonsa stands up from her armchair as he enters, pausing in the doorway. She inclines her head very slightly.

ALFONSA

Good evening. Please come in. I am señorita Alfonsa.

JOHN GRADY

Evenin, ma'am. I'm John Grady Cole.

ALFONSA

I am happy that you have come.

She half-turns, gesturing to an antique chess table made of fine inlaid woods, ivory. The pieces are set for a game.

ALFONSA

Do you play, Mr. Cole?

INT. THE SAME - LATER

A full-length portrait of Alfonsa as a fifteen-year old debutante, strikingly beautiful in her formal gown, stares down from the wall as...

She studies her late-game position. The clock ticks out in the hall. When she reaches her left hand to move a rook, we see that...

The hand is disfigured, with its last two fingers missing and a dull red scar across the back.

John Grady's gaze rests on her hand, briefly. When he looks up at her, their eyes meet. He looks at the board again, moves his bishop decisively. She sighs, shakes her head.

ALFONSA

That was foolish of me. The queen's knight. That was a blunder. You play very well.

JOHN GRADY

Yes ma'am. You play well yourself.

ALFONSA

Where did you learn?

JOHN GRADY

My grandfather taught me.

ALFONSA

He must be a very good player.

JOHN GRADY

He was about the best I ever saw.

She reaches out to a crystal decanter, pouring them each a glass of sherry. Her injured hand steadies the glasses.

ALFONSA

I lost my fingers in a shooting accident. The right barrel burst. I was seventeen. Alejandra's age. It happened two years after that portrait was painted.

John Grady looks again at the painting. Then at her.

ALFONSA

There is nothing to be embarrassed about. People are curious. I'm going to guess that the scar on your cheek was put there by a horse.

JOHN GRADY

Yes ma'am. It was my own fault.

She watches him, not unkindly. She smiles.

ALFONSA

Scars have the strange power to remind us that our past is real. The events that cause them can never be forgotten, can they?

JOHN GRADY

No ma'am.

ALFONSA

Alejandra will be in Mexico City with her mother for two weeks. Then she will be here for the summer.

He is silent, uneasy. She takes a precise sip of sherry.

ALFONSA

Here we live in a small world. A close world. Alejandra and I disagree strongly. Quite strongly in

ALFONSA (contd.)

fact. She is so like me at that age that I seem at times to be struggling with my own past self.

She sets her glass down carefully, then looks at him.

ALFONSA

You see, I cannot help but be sympathetic to Alejandra. Even at her worst. But I won't have her unhappy. I won't have her spoken ill of. Or gossiped about. I know what that is. She thinks that she can toss her head and dismiss everything. But in the real world, such talk has terrible consequences. Not excluding bloodshed. Not excluding death.

He is silent. She leans forward. Her eyes are piercing.

ALFONSA

Even though you are younger than she it is not proper for you to be seen riding in the campo together without supervision. I have considered whether to speak to my niece about this, but I have decided not to.

They look at each other. The clock ticks.

JOHN GRADY

What do you want me to do?

ALFONSA

I want you to be considerate of a young girl's reputation.

JOHN GRADY

I never meant not to be.

ALFONSA

I believe you. But you must understand. This is another country. Here a woman's reputation is all she has. There is no forgiveness, you see.

JOHN GRADY

Ma'am?

ALFONSA

There is no forgiveness. For women. A

ALFONSA (contd.)

man may lose his honor and regain it again. But a woman cannot. She cannot.

She watches him. He touches his hat, then looks up.

JOHN GRADY

I guess I'd have to say that that don't seem right.

ALFONSA

Right...? No. It's not a matter of right. You must understand. It is a matter of who must say. In this matter I get to say. I am the one who gets to say.

She sits watching him. He rises, his face flushed, and picks up his hat.

JOHN GRADY

Well. I guess I ought to say that you didn't have to invite me over here just to tell me that.

ALFONSA

No. You're quite right. But then we would have missed the pleasure of our game.

She smiles at him, quite calmly.

EXT. ARROYO - DAY

Rain is falling over a small herd of mustangs, perhaps six, who have been trapped in a deep gulch. They snort and wheel about, unable to break through a rope netting that stretches across the far end.

At the near end of this gulch, Rawlins and John Grady, in their slickers, are piling up a brushwood screen to complete this temporary pen. Rawlins pauses, holding a branch.

RAWLINS

You think she was speakin for Rocha?

JOHN GRADY

No. It wasnt like that.

RAWLINS

She thinks you got eyes for the daughter.

JOHN GRADY

I do have eyes for the daughter.

Rawlins throws his branch on the pile. They look at each other tensely. Their faces are wet.

JOHN GRADY

You aint sorry you come down here
are you?

RAWLINS

Not yet.

John Grady nods. Rawlins takes his hat off, wipes his face, pulls his hat on again.

RAWLINS

I know the old man likes you. But
that dont mean he'll set still for
you courtin his daughter.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah, I know.

RAWLINS

I dont see you holdin no aces.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

RAWLINS

What I see is you fixin to get us
fired and run off the place.

John Grady is silent. Rawlins stares at the trapped and frightened horses. John Grady follows his gaze.

RAWLINS

Did you give her your word?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. I dont know if I did or not.

RAWLINS

Well either you did or you didnt.

JOHN GRADY

That's what I'd of thought. But I
dont know.

Rawlins stares back at him, frustrated. The rain falls.

IN. JOHN GRADY'S ROOM - NIGHT

John Grady is asleep in his cot when he's awakened by a soft tapping. He turns over, looks at...

His door. There is a wavering light beneath it. The tapping comes again.

He sits up on the edge of his bed, reaching to the floor for his pants. He keeps his voice low.

JOHN GRADY

Momento.

He pulls his pants on, rises. Barechested and barefoot he crosses to his door, opens it.

Alejandra is standing in the dark corridor, holding a flashlight aimed at the floor. He whispers.

JOHN GRADY

What is it?

ALEJANDRA

It's me.

She shines the light on her own face. Quickly he covers the beam with his hand, looking towards the far staircase.

JOHN GRADY

We're going to wake Estéban.

ALEJANDRA

Then invite me in.

He steps back and she slips in past him. She wears pants and a shirt and riding boots. He shuts the door softly, dropping the wooden latch, then turns and looks at her. She is tense, angry, unable to keep still.

ALEJANDRA

What did she say to you?

JOHN GRADY

She must of told you what she said.

ALEJANDRA

Of course she did. What did she say?

JOHN GRADY

You want to set down?

She turns, sitting sideways on his bed with one foot tucked under her. She puts the burning flashlight down, then pushes it under his sheet where it suffuses the room with a soft glow. He comes and stands before her.

JOHN GRADY

She didnt want me to be seen with you. Out on the campo.

ALEJANDRA

And you agreed. You're afraid of her.

JOHN GRADY

No.

ALEJANDRA

Just like everyone else.

JOHN GRADY

No. It aint like that.

ALEJANDRA

I wont be treated in such a manner.

She looks up at him. In this shadowy light she looks haunted, lost. Her eyes glisten with tears.

ALEJANDRA

I thought you were my friend.

He looks at her helplessly. He sits beside her.

JOHN GRADY

Tell me what to do. I'll do anything you say.

He reaches to touch her wet cheek. She captures his hand, brings it to her lips, kissing his fingers. She looks up at him, deep into his eyes...

EXT. THE PLAINS

Under a vast moon, a pair of riders streak across the grasslands, racing each other...

EXT. CIENEGA ROAD

John Grady pulls up on the panting stallion, reaches to pat his neck, waiting for Alejandra. She rides up behind him on the Arabian, laughing despite having lost the race. They are both riding bareback. She looks off beyond the fringes of marsh grass to the black water of the lake. She looks back

at John Grady, a question in her eyes...

EXT. THE LAKE

The two horses stand side by side, up to their chests in the lake, drinking. All around them, a million stars shimmer and dance on the dark surface...

On the shore John Grady removes his underpants, then walks out into the lake. After a few strides he dives ahead, swims a few strokes underwater, then comes up tossing his hair. Treading water he turns, looks back at...

Alejandra standing on the shore beside her pooled clothing. She is wearing only her shirt. She looks out at him. Then slowly she unbuttons her shirt, pulls it off, dropping it on the ground. She walks into the water, so pale, so slender, then begins to swim towards him...

When she reaches him he holds out his hand and she takes it. Her black hair floats on the water. She puts her other arm around his shoulder, then turns, looking toward the moon. He follows her gaze. She turns her face up to his, whispers.

ALEJANDRA

Me quieres?

JOHN GRADY

Yes. Alejandra. God yes.

He kisses her, and she responds passionately, both of her wrists sliding around his neck as they slowly spiral...

INT./EXT. LA PURISIMA - MONTAGE

Pausing to look around, Alejandra slips away from the barn in gray pre-dawn shadows...

Rocha and John Grady are playing pool in the hacienda. As the boy lines up a shot, Rocha studies him with a searching, troubled expression. But after John Grady shoots, looks up to meet his gaze, Rocha smiles politely...

John Grady opens his door; Alejandra is standing there again with her flashlight. She enters; he shuts and latches the door. As he turns towards her she rushes into his arms, kissing him feverishly...

In bright sunlight, John Grady passes Estéban, who is brushing the stallion in front of the barn. The boy waves a cheerful greeting as he goes by. The old man's eyes follow him but he says nothing...

Alejandra and John Grady are making love in his cot, by candlelight. She is above him, her black hair swaying around his face. As she begins to cry out, he puts the heel of his hand against her mouth and she bites into it...

Alejandra is asleep in John Grady's arms. Her hair fans across the pillow. He silently studies her features, one by one, as if memorizing them...

EXT. THE CAMPO - DAY

John Grady is riding the stallion out on the plains when he stops, seeing something in the distance that surprises him...

The red Cessna sits on its grassy airstrip, preparing for takeoff. Armando's Jeep is parked nearby, and he is stowing suitcases in the baggage compartment. Rocha is helping Alejandra step up onto the wing root. She hesitates before entering the open cabin door, turns back towards her father as if to protest, but he takes her firmly by the elbow and compels her inside...

John Grady is unsure what to do. He has half a thought to gallop towards the plane. The stallion steps in place, shaking his head...

Rocha, on the wing, has turned back to say a few words to Armando, who nods. As he is about to step through the cabin door, he looks up and sees the distant boy and the horse. Rocha stares at John Grady for a long moment. His face is dark, tormented; there is an infinite sadness in his eyes. Then he turns without a word and climbs into the plane...

Moments later John Grady watches helplessly as the plane roars down the airstrip and takes off, its shadow flashing over him. Shielding his eyes, he watches for a long time as it diminishes in the distance, taking Alejandra away...

INT. JOHN GRADY'S ROOM - DAWN

John Grady is asleep in his darkened room when a flashlight suddenly shines into his eyes. He wakes, blinking...

The TWO MEN behind it are little more than looming shapes in the dark. But one is holding a rifle, the other a pistol.

MAN'S VOICE

Vámonos.

INT. BARN BAY

John Grady, now wearing his boots, pants, and a shirt, is

prodded at a brisk walk through the barn. Behind him are a pair of Mexican RANGERS in dirty khaki uniforms and caps, carrying rifles. Another PAIR walk ahead of him, led by a LIEUTENANT, who is holding a Colt automatic service revolver. John Grady tries to stop them, protesting.

JOHN GRADY

Quién es?

A ranger shoves him forward with his rifle butt...

EXT. BARNYARD

Two more RANGERS are in the yard, holding the reins of the squad's horses. Rawlins is sitting slumped in the saddle on his horse with his hands cuffed before him and his reins on the ground. Redbo is standing saddled beside Junior.

As John Grady emerges from the barn, blinking in the light, he is jabbed again with a rifle, stumbling towards Redbo. He rights himself against his horse, looking at Rawlins.

JOHN GRADY

What's this all about, pardner?

Rawlins doesn't answer. He leans and spits and looks away. The lieutenant shoves John Grady on the shoulder.

LIEUTENANT

No hable. Vamonos.

EXT. BUNKHOUSE

Vaqueros are standing or squatting along the ramada. More of them drift out from inside, watching with dark, impassive faces as...

The two American boys, now both handcuffed, ride past them towards Armando's house, which is dark, and the hacienda gate. Pairs of rangers ride ahead of and behind them, with their carbines resting across their pommels. No one looks over towards the vaqueros...

The old groom, Esteban, is among the watching men. As the riders diminish towards the open plains, he makes quickly over his breast the sign of the cross...

EXT. HIGH COUNTRY - DAY

From a distance, under a blazing sun, the file of riders traverses a ridgeline, climbing toward the blue sierras...

EXT. A ROAD - NIGHT

They trot down a road in the moonlight, seven men and two boys, raising clouds of dust. Riding through a barren cross-roads, they pass a wooden sign with arrows pointing to different destinations. One reads: "La Encantada 107 km..."

EXT. ENCANTADA - DAY

Caked with dust, weary in their saddles, the riders clomp through the streets of the pueblo. As they pass the bright yellow church, John Grady recognizes it: this is where they retook Blevins' horse. He looks over at Rawlins to see if he also knows this place. But Rawlins won't meet his eyes.

EXT. THE ALAMEDA - DAY

A fountain spews weakly in the little square. Ranged before it is a gaggle of perhaps a dozen CHILDREN, of all ages, all standing in the dust and staring curiously towards...

John Grady and Rawlins, who are seated side by side on a bench of iron slats. Guards slouch nearby with rifles. John Grady smiles wearily, winks at...

Two GIRLS, aged about ten. They smile shyly back at him, twisting their skirts, then look at each other, giggle.

Rawlins shakes his head, disgusted.

RAWLINS

Ladies man.

John Grady looks at him. Rawlins stares at the fountain.

JOHN GRADY

Dont sull up on me. Let's get it aired.

RAWLINS

I aint above whippin your ass, you know.

JOHN GRADY

You think it was Rocha. That he sold us up the river.

RAWLINS

Dont you?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. I cant see where you've done nothin wrong. What's the charge?

RAWLINS

What makes you think they need one?

A silence. John Grady looks down at his manacled hands.

JOHN GRADY

Would it satisfy you if I was to just go on and admit to bein a fourteen carat gold plated son of a bitch?

RAWLINS

I never said that. I tried to reason with you, that's all. But you wouldnt listen.

JOHN GRADY

I know you did. But some things aint reasonable. Be that as it may I'm the same man you crossed that river with. How I was is how I am and all I know to do is stick. I never even promised you you wouldnt die down here.

Rawlins looks at him.

JOHN GRADY

I dont believe in signin on just till it quits suitin you. You either stick or you quit and I wouldnt quit you I dont care what you done. And that's about all I got to say.

Rawlins looks out towards the children, who stare back at him solemnly. He looks at John Grady, a long moment.

RAWLINS

I never quit you.

JOHN GRADY

All right.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

A heavy iron-strapped door is opened, and Rawlins and John Grady, without their handcuffs, are shoved into a big dark cell. The only light falls in patterns through a judas-hole in the door and from two small barred windows high on one wall. As the boys stumble about in the darkness, they hear a man's voice.

MAN'S VOICE
Cuidado con el bote.

JOHN GRADY
Dont step in the bucket.

Rawlins' face is broken into stripes by the window light as he turns, peering into the gloom.

RAWLINS
Where is it? I cant see a damn thing.

Another voice, younger, comes from the darkness.

BOY'S VOICE
Is that you all?

Rawlins turns slowly, stunned. Eyes narrowing in pain.

RAWLINS
Ah God. No.

JOHN GRADY
Blevins?

BLEVINS
Yeah. It's me.

Rawlins and John Grady look at each other, almost despairing. Then they make their way carefully to the rear, where they see first an outstretched leg, then the rest of Blevins. He's scrawny, ragged and filthy. When John Grady squats beside him he tries to smile. His face is sweaty, feverish.

JOHN GRADY
How long have you been here?

BLEVINS
I dont know. A long time.

RAWLINS
You told em to hunt us, didn't you?

BLEVINS
Never done no such thing.

RAWLINS
Bullshit. They wouldnt have hunted us once they got the horse back. He's done somethin.

BLEVINS

It was my goddamn horse. My saddle
and gun too.

JOHN GRADY

What have you done.

BLEVINS

Aint done nothin that nobody else
wouldnt of.

JOHN GRADY

Did you come back here?

BLEVINS

Damn right I come back here.

RAWLINS

Ah Jesus. Ah God.

JOHN GRADY

You dumb shit. Tell me the rest.

Blevins is silent. John Grady turns. Sprawled in the corner
is ORLANDO, a wiry old man with white hair and a blind eye.
He watches them calmly.

JOHN GRADY

De qué crimen queda acusado el joven?

ORLANDO

Asesinato.

JOHN GRADY

El ha matado un hombre?

Orlando smiles faintly, holds up three gnarled fingers. John
Grady stares at him.

RAWLINS

What did he say? I know what the
son of a bitch said.

JOHN GRADY

He said he's killed three men.

BLEVINS

That's a damn lie.

Rawlins walks to the opposite wall. With his back against
it he slides weakly to the ground.

RAWLINS

We're dead. We're dead men. I knew it'd come to this. From the first time I seen him.

JOHN GRADY

That aint goin to help us.

BLEVINS

Aint but one of em died.

JOHN GRADY

Tell me what happened.

BLEVINS

I worked on a farm for a couple of months, saved me up some money. Then I rode back here to get my pistol. Seen it stuck right in the son of a bitch's belt, so I walked up behind him and grabbed it.

JOHN GRADY

And shot him.

BLEVINS

He come at me. What choice did I have?

JOHN GRADY

What choice.

BLEVINS

Time I got back to the spring where my horse was at they was on me. That ol boy I shot off his horse thowed down on me with a shotgun.

JOHN GRADY

You shot one of the rurales?

BLEVINS

It was him or me.

JOHN GRADY

Dead?

BLEVINS

Hell yeah.

They sit quietly in the dark. A long pause. Rawlins stares at the concrete floor. John Grady's voice is very soft.

JOHN GRADY

What do they mean to do with you?

BLEVINS

Send me to the penitentiary I reckon.

RAWLINS

You aint goin to be that lucky.

BLEVINS

I aint old enough to hang.

RAWLINS

They'll lie about your age for you.

JOHN GRADY

They dont have no capital punishment
in this country. Dont listen to him.

RAWLINS

You knew they was huntin us, didnt
you? Askin after two American boys.
Checkin every goddamn ranch -

BLEVINS

Yeah, I knew it. What was I supposed
to do, send you a telegram?

Rawlins is silent, enraged. He turns away his face. John
Grady looks at Blevins.

JOHN GRADY

Do they ever let you out? Do you
at least get to walk around?

BLEVINS

I dont know.

JOHN GRADY

What do you mean you dont know?

BLEVINS

I caint walk.

RAWLINS

Bullshit you caint walk. How come?

BLEVINS

Cause they busted my feet all to
hell is how come.

John Grady looks at Rawlins, then across the cell at Orlando.

The old man's milky eye seems to stare back at him, blank and pitiless...

EXT. THE JAIL - NEXT DAY

A fierce sun beats down on the jail, an adobe building with a corrugated tin roof and an empty mud bellocot above it. We hear a muffled cry of pain, trailing off...

INT. THE CELL

Blevins is asleep, or unconscious. Rawlins is missing. John Grady paces the cell. Orlando sits watching him...

There are noises in the hall outside, then the door is unlocked, opened. Two guards enter with Rawlins. When they release him he sags to his knees, then topples forward. John Grady catches him before his head hits the floor.

JOHN GRADY

You sons of bitches.

Orlando has joined John Grady, helping him. Together they lower Rawlins' back and head to the floor. He whispers.

RAWLINS

Tell em whatever they want to hear, bud. It dont make a damn.

GUARD

Vámonos.

JOHN GRADY

What did you tell them?

RAWLINS

Told em we was horsethieves and murderers. You will too.

One of the guards comes forward, yanking John Grady up by his arm. He resists for a moment, staring helplessly at Rawlins. Orlando cradles Rawlins' head in his lap, looks up.

ORLANDO

Tienes que ser fuerte.

Then John Grady is being hauled out of the cell, and its door slammed behind him.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE

John Grady, handcuffed, is shoved into a large, nearly empty

room. Behind a gray metal desk in one corner sits the CAPTAIN, a stout man, 38, in a tight khaki uniform with a yellow scarf around his neck. He looks out the window, tapping on his lower teeth with a pencil.

CAPTAIN

Les esposas.

A guard steps forward and unlocks the handcuffs. Then both guards retreat to flank the door. The captain swivels in his chair. He examines his pencil, then lays it by his pad.

CAPTAIN

Your friend has tell us everything. You will find it is best to do the same. That way you dont have no troubles.

JOHN GRADY

You didnt have no call to beat up on that boy. We dont know nothin about Blevins. He asked to ride with us, that's all. We aint seen him for near three months. We been workin for señor Rocha down at La Purisima. You went down there and told him a bunch of lies or he never wouldve let you took us. Lacey Rawlins is as good a boy as ever come out of Tom Green County.

CAPTAIN

He is a criminal.

JOHN GRADY

He aint a criminal. I've known him all my life. We were raised together. We went to the same school.

The captain lights a cigarette, taking his time, then leans back in his chair, squinting through the smoke.

CAPTAIN

Deme su billetera.

John Grady takes his billfold from his hip pocket, steps forward and lays it on the desk, then steps back. The captain opens it, removes the contents, spreading them out on his desk like playing cards.

CAPTAIN

Where is your license of operator?

JOHN GRADY
I dont have one.

CAPTAIN
You have destroy it.

JOHN GRADY
I dont have one. I never did.

CAPTAIN
The assassin Blevins has no documents.

JOHN GRADY
He lost his clothes.

CAPTAIN
He lost his clothes?

JOHN GRADY
Yes.

CAPTAIN
Why he come here to steal horses?

JOHN GRADY
It was his horse. He lost it in a
thunderstorm.

CAPTAIN
No. The horse is not his horse.

JOHN GRADY
Well, have it your own ignorant way.

CAPTAIN
Como?

JOHN GRADY
As far as I know that horse is his
horse. He had it with him in Texas
and I know he brought it into Mexi-
co because I seen him ride it across
the river.

The captain sits drumming his fingers on his chair arm.

CAPTAIN
I dont believe you. These are not
the facts. Not the facts.

He half swivels in his chair, looking out the window.

CAPTAIN

We can make the truth here. Or we can lose it. Here. But in three days you will go to Saltillo and then it will be too late. Then you will be in the hands of other parties. Who can say what the truth will be then? At that time? Then you will blame yourself. You will see.

He turns back, studies John Grady intently. A long moment.

CAPTAIN

You like this little town?

JOHN GRADY

It's all right.

CAPTAIN

The peoples in this town are quiet peoples. All the time very quiet.

He leans forward, stubs out his cigarette in his ashtray.

CAPTAIN

Then comes the assassin Blevins to steal horses and kill everybody. Why is that? He was a quiet boy and never do no harm and then he come here and do these things something like that?

He shakes his head in a sad way, then wags a finger.

CAPTAIN

No. No. What is the truth is this: He was no a quiet boy. He was this other kind of boy all the time. All the time.

INT. JAIL CELL

Rawlins is still huddled on the floor with Orlando next to him. They look up as the door opens and the guards enter with John Grady, who is unharmed. They push him aside and pick up the groggy Blevins by his elbows. Hobbling out between them, he moans softly. The door closes. John Grady crosses, squats down facing Rawlins.

JOHN GRADY

How you doin?

RAWLINS

I'm okay. Blevins is sick, though.

RAWLINS (contd.)
He's real bad.

JOHN GRADY
I know it.

RAWLINS
What happened to you?

JOHN GRADY
Nothin.

RAWLINS
How come?

John Grady shakes his head, troubled. He sits down next to Rawlins, his back against the wall.

JOHN GRADY
I think we're goin to Saltillo.

RAWLINS
What's in Saltillo?

John Grady looks at Orlando.

ORLANDO
La carcel grande.

JOHN GRADY
The penitentiary.

Rawlins shifts, wincing. John Grady stares at the floor.

JOHN GRADY
I think he wants to make some kind of a deal with us.

RAWLINS
What kind of a deal.

JOHN GRADY
To keep quiet. That kind of a deal.

RAWLINS
Keep quiet about what?

JOHN GRADY
About Blevins.

RAWLINS
Keep quiet about what about Blevins?

John Grady looks up at the square of window light. Finally he looks again at Rawlins, haunted.

JOHN GRADY

I think they aim to kill him. I think they aim to kill Blevins.

Rawlins stares back at him, shocked...

EXT. FLATBED TRUCK - DRIVING - DAY

Three GUARDS, just boys themselves in illfitting uniforms, sit with their backs against the tailgate of a big flatbed truck, balancing rifles. Their dark eyes stare at...

Rawlins, John Grady, and Blevins, who sit opposite them, handcuffed and chained together, amidst stacks of crates, parcels, feedsacks, and five-gallon army gas cans. The boys look at the passing buildings of Encantada...

EXT. A HACIENDA

The flatbed turns off a country road, drives through the gate of a hacienda, and stops with its engine idling in front of the ranchhouse. The horn is sounded. After a moment the screen door opens and a burly man in his 50s steps out. He's dressed like a CHARRO, or cowboy, and wears a sweatstained straw hat. He looks uneasily at the truck.

In the bed of the truck, Rawlins and John Grady exchange a puzzled glance. Blevins is asleep.

The captain climbs out of the truck cab, stands by its door. He's wearing a peaked cap, pipeclayed leather belt and holster, and a .45 automatic. Without a word the charro gets into the cab, then the captain climbs in after him and shuts the door. The truck starts off again.

EXT. PAVED ROAD

From a distance, we see the truck barrelling along through a sandy vastness dotted with saguaros, under a pure blue desert sky...

INT. FLATBED - MOVING

Blevins is awake now, feeling cheerful. He lies propped against a fat feedsack, arms under his head. The hot wind whips at his hair as he smiles up at the sky.

BLEVINS

Boys, this is goin to be a long

BLEVINS (contd.)
old trip. The old man said it'd
take all day to get there. I asked
him. Said all day.

Rawlins and John Grady look at him, then at each other. They remain silent.

EXT. DESERT

The truck slows, turns off the paved road, and begins to labor down a dirt track, leaving a roostertail of dust...

In the back, one young guard glances at another, and...

John Grady and Rawlins catch this moment. Still they say nothing.

EXT. ABANDONED ESTANCIA

The truck drives past a thick grove of trees and up to a quadrangle of roofless mud buildings. It stops, dust boiling over it. The captain opens his door, steps out, looking around. After a moment the charro climbs down, too, fanning himself with his hat. He seems unhappy.

In the flatbed, one of the guards stands up with his key ring, unlocks the chain linking the three Americans. Blevins looks at him, puzzled, then over at the ruined buildings.

BLEVINS
What's here?

Another guard unpins the gate and drops it, then all three guards jump to the ground. One waves his rifle.

GUARD
Vámonos.

The three boys rise stiffly, then drop from the truck. Blevins sags, wincing, when his boots hit the ground, and John Grady has to catch him under the armpits, steady him.

BLEVINS
What do we do here?

JOHN GRADY
I dont know.

RAWLINS
Take a leak, I reckon.

They glance around uneasily...

The driver hasn't moved; he's slumped back in his seat, hat over his eyes. The three guards are smoking. The captain approaches them, trailed by the charro. He takes a rifle from one of the guards, hands it to the charro. The man hefts its unfamiliar weight. Another guard approaches the Americans.

GUARD

Vámonos.

The three boys turn, start to walk, but the guard stops them with a hand on John Grady's chest. He looks at Blevins.

GUARD

Sólo el chico. Vámonos.

BLEVINS

What are they goin to do?

RAWLINS

They aint goin to do nothin.

He looks at John Grady. John Grady says nothing, but his mouth is tight. Blevins is looking back and forth at them, puzzled. Then he stares at the guard with dawning horror.

GUARD

Vámonos.

BLEVINS

Wait a minute...

GUARD

Están esperando.

Blevins twists away from his grip, sits on the ground. The guard's face clouds up; he looks towards the captain...

Blevins has wrenched off one boot. He reaches down inside it, pulls out the black and sweaty innersole, throws this away. He reaches in again as the guard yanks him to his feet by one thin arm. He is flailing about, trying to hand something to John Grady. He hisses.

BLEVINS

Here. Take it.

He thrusts something into John Grady's hands, an instant before the guard jerks him around by his arm, causing him to drop his boot. The guard pushes him forward, away from the truck. The captain and the charro are standing there expect-

tantly. Blevins tries to twist back around.

BLEVINS

Wait. I need to get my boot.

But the guard is shoving him onward. As he limps away towards the grove of trees, the captain and the charro fall into step on either side of him. The guard walks back towards his comrades...

Rawlins looks at John Grady, near tears. A fierce whisper.

RAWLINS

Dont you say nothin.

JOHN GRADY

All right.

RAWLINS

Dont you say a damn word.

John Grady, in a daze, is staring after Blevins...

Blevins looks back at them, just once, mute and terrified, before turning away again, limping onwards with his two keepers. The captain puts one arm around the small, thin, ragged figure, like some kindly advisor, just before they disappear into the darkness of the trees. Cicadas are buzzing loudly...

John Grady tears his gaze away. He looks desperately at...

The rurales, who are squatting with their cigarettes. One of the young guards looks back at him; his eyes seem frightened too. Then he looks away...

John Grady stares up at the sky...

A hawk circles there, riding the hot updrafts in a lazy spiral. The cicadas buzz. It all seems so unreal.

He becomes aware of something in his clenched fists. Opening his fingers, he stares down at...

The thick wad of dirty, crumpled peso notes that Blevins managed to bequeath him...

His eyes are wet. He looks at Rawlins. Rawlins leans and puts his fists on the truck bed and lays his forehead down and closes his eyes tightly. He whispers, trembling.

RAWLINS

They caint just walk him out there
and shoot him. Hell fire. Just walk
him out there -

The sound of a distant pistol shot. A shudder passes through both boys. After a moment a second shot. They flinch again. A low moan comes from deep in Rawlins throat.

The guards rise from where they've been squatting, step on their cigarettes, hitch their pants. The cicadas have stopped for a few seconds, but now resume their buzzing...

The captain comes walking back out of the trees, carrying the rifle and Blevins' handcuffs. He is followed, more slowly, by the downcast charro. The captain hurls the rifle to a guard, then heads for the truck without breaking stride.

CAPTAIN

Vámonos.

One of the guards motions for Rawlins and John Grady to get back into the truck. They climb up onto the bed, sitting with their backs against the side as the guard climbs in after them, relocking their chain...

Another guard, walking back towards the truck, notices Blevins' boot still lying in the grass. He bends, picks this up, pitches it into the high weeds.

In the truck, Rawlins is fighting tears. He looks sideways at John Grady, whispers.

RAWLINS

We're okay. We're okay.

But John Grady is still staring off towards the grove of trees. Still staring as the truck's engine starts, and as it begins to move, pulling quickly away from the ruins...

EXT. PRISON - SALTILLO - NIGHT

In a pouring rain, we see the massive stone walls and guard towers of the old penitentiary. Searchlights cut through the gloom, and one of them seizes on...

The flatbed truck as it stops outside the great gates, and the two handcuffed boys are helped down by their guards. A small port opens in one of the gates as NEW GUARDS emerge to shepherd the prisoners inside. Then the door slams heavily.

INT. SECURITY CHECKPOINT

John Grady and Rawlins, uncuffed, squat on the stone floor of a small chamber. Dripping wet, blankets around their shoulders. They stare at their boots in miserable silence. After a long moment the door opens and the captain comes in. He stands looking down at them under the flat glare of the naked overhead bulb. They avoid his eyes. A pause.

CAPTAIN

This man came to me. I dont go to him. He came to me. Speaking of justice. Of the honor of his family. Of his own brother, dead by the hand of the assassin Blevins. Then comes the time for justice, but this pendejo he can no shoot. Yes? He becomes a woman.

The captain spits. The boys stare at the floor.

CAPTAIN

Here we have no death for the criminals. You see. Arrangements must be made. Monies must be paid. I tell you this because you will be making arrangements you self. Here.

John Grady looks up.

JOHN GRADY

We dont have any money. We aint fixin to make any arrangements.

CAPTAIN

Excuse me but you will. You dont know nothing.

JOHN GRADY

What did you do with our horses.

CAPTAIN

We are not talking about horses now. Those horses must wait. The rightful owners must be found of those horses.

John Grady's voice breaks.

JOHN GRADY

You son of a bitch. You didnt have to kill him. You couldve just brought him back to the truck.

The captain crosses to John Grady, stands over him, breathing heavily. Rawlins looks away. After a long moment the captain kneels beside John Grady. His bloodshot eyes come very close; his voice remains soft.

CAPTAIN

You cannot stay here. In this place. You stay here you going to die. Then come other problems. Papers is lost. Peoples cannot be found. Who can say that some body was even here? Some crazy person, he can say that God is here. But everybody knows that God is no here.

He raises one meaty fist, which hovers near John Grady's face. The boy stares back at him without flinching. Then the captain taps his knuckles gently against the wall beside John Grady's cheek. He smiles.

CAPTAIN

God is no here.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAYS LATER

Under a scorching sun, we TRAVEL through the dirt exercise yard. It seems less a prison than a walled village, seething with barter and intrigue. Scores of CONVICTS stand in little groups, smoking, play cards under makeshift blanket tents, huddle by cookfires, lift crudely fashioned barbells. Another group of men plays soccer with a much-taped ball...

John Grady and Rawlins sit on the ground, back to back, carefully studying anyone passing within twenty feet. Rawlins' nose is broken and badly swollen, both eyes ringed in purple. John Grady has one eye swollen shut, crusted blood on his lips and chin.

RAWLINS

I never knowed there was such a place as this.

JOHN GRADY

I guess there's probly every kind of place you can think of.

RAWLINS

I wouldnt of thought of this one.

(pause)

You reckon if we was to just give em Blevins' money, they might stop jumpin us?

JOHN GRADY

They'd never believe that's all we got. We're Americans. We might have to whup ever last one of em.

Rawlins nods ruefully, not surprised. He tries to smile.

RAWLINS

All over a goddamned horse.

JOHN GRADY

Horse had nothin to do with it.

Rawlins looks at him.

JOHN GRADY

It was never about just a horse.

The soccer ball is bounding towards them, followed by running players...

Rawlins catches it, rising to give it back. As the players swarm around him, a dozen or so men, he is momentarily obscured. There is a great deal of shouting, jostling, dust: some kind of argument over the ball. One man grabs it, tossing it back towards the center of the yard, then they all set off running that way. Rawlins is revealed again, swaying a bit, staring down at his stomach, where three broad stripes of blood are seeping through his shirt. He sags to his knees, looking up in amazement as John Grady hurries to his side.

RAWLINS

Aw shit, bud.

JOHN GRADY

Let me see.

RAWLINS

Son of a bitch.

John Grady lifts the bloodsoaked shirt. He is shocked but tries to hide it as he touches the knife wounds.

JOHN GRADY

It aint that bad.

RAWLINS

Aw shit. Son of a bitch.

JOHN GRADY

Can you walk?

RAWLINS

Yeah, I can walk.

John Grady pulls Rawlins' left arm across his shoulders, helps him to his feet. As they stumble across the yard, other prisoners stop to stare at them. No one helps, but no one blocks their path. Rawlins moans.

JOHN GRADY

Come on, pardner. I got you. It's okay. I got you...

EXT. GATESHACK

As they reach the gateshack, John Grady pounds with a bloody fist on the wooden door. After a moment a GUARD'S face appears, staring out through the sallyport. He looks at John Grady, then he looks at Rawlins.

JOHN GRADY

Llamar a un medico.

The guard hesitates. John Grady shouts.

JOHN GRADY

Un medico!

Finally the man opens the gate, then he and another guard grab Rawlins' arms. As they sway him around, John Grady has a final glimpse of his friend. The blood has spread halfway down his pants legs. Rawlins smiles at him weakly.

RAWLINS

Bud...?

Then the wooden door is slammed in John Grady's face. He looks at it for a moment, his eyes wet, before turning to face out across the prison yard...

A wide semi-circle of convicts is standing there, staring at him curiously...

He looks back at them. Utterly alone now...

FADE TO:

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAYS LATER

John Grady's facial wounds have mostly healed. He is crossing the yard with a studied saunter; it is a great effort to conceal his fear. Every face that looms past him is a potential threat. As he walks, he eases a cigarette pack

from his shirt pocket, flips out the end of one, takes it between his lips...

A pair of brothers, big dark INDIANS, are sitting on the ground in the shade of the wall. They look up, expressionless, as John Grady pauses beside them.

JOHN GRADY

Tiene una cerilla?

After a moment one of the men nods. He takes out a wooden match, pops it with his thumb. John Grady squats with his cigarette, cupping one palm around the flame; his hand and the Indian's rest together briefly. Then John Grady nods.

JOHN GRADY

Gracias.

The Indian nods, waving out the match. We catch a momentary glimpse of Blevins' wad of pesos, now in his hand, before the Indian slips them into his shirt pocket with his matchbox. He looks out across the crowded yard.

INDIAN

Hay un cordón.

He nods briefly towards John Grady's boots, then both Indians rise, moving away. John Grady glances down...

When he moves his toe, a string is revealed in his bootprint, its far end disappearing into the dirt.

Still squatting, his eyes scanning for danger, John Grady reaches down with one hand for this string, tugs gently...

A switchblade slithers up from the ground, thin and gleaming, and dangles beside his boot...

John Grady stares at it.

INT. MESS HALL - DUSK

A pair of GUARDS stand blocking the open doors of the mess hall. Outside is the yard. Their eyes flicker across...

A chow line where CONVICTS are being served beans, stew and tortillas by aproned TRUSTIES. Men leave the serving line with their metal trays, make their way to long tables and benches, where others are eating. There's a loud murmur of conversation. The big hall is about half full, perhaps as many as a hundred men...

John Grady is at a table where only one other convict sits, a BOY of 19. John Grady spoons up some beans, chews on them. He glances over at the boy, who is smoking, sipping coffee. He has long black greasy hair, tattoos on his forearms and the base of his thumbs. The boy ignores him.

As John Grady lifts another spoonful towards his lips, he pauses. He becomes aware of a sudden hush in the room. All conversation has stopped; there is only the dull scrape and clicking of spoons. He looks towards the chow line.

The trusties are gone. The serving pots are covered...

He looks towards the front of the hall.

The doors are closed now. The two guards are missing...

Slowly, trying to keep his hand from shaking, John Grady brings the spoon to his lips. Chewing, he glances again at his tablemate. The boy, still ignoring him, blows two thin streams of smoke from his nose.

Under the table, John Grady eases the switchblade from his pocket. Quietly he flicks the blade open alongside his leg, then slips the knife down into his boot, handle out...

The boy stubs out his cigarette. Then he stands, steps over the bench, takes up his tray. He turns, starting down along the far side of the table...

John Grady's right hand grips the edge of his tray...

The boy comes opposite him. He passes...

John Grady watches him with a lowered gaze...

At the end of the table the boy suddenly turns and slices the tray towards his head. The edge of it races directly towards his eyes...

John Grady flings his own tray up and the corner of the boy's tray dents the bottom of it with a loud crash. Beans and coffee and plates and tin cups go flying...

John Grady rolls backwards over the bench, scrabbling to his feet just as the boy chops at him again with the tray. Again John Grady parries with his own tray, backing along the bench, giving ground as the trays clang like shields...

The boy has a knife in his other hand now; it sweeps glittering beneath his tray as he tries to mask its thrusts...

John Grady leaps away from the blade, but...

His feet slip in the spilled food on the concrete floor and he stumbles to his knees...

As the cuchillero comes at him, John Grady swings his tray backhanded, catching the boy's temple. As the boy stops, momentarily surprised, John Grady's right hand whips up with his own knife. He lurches to his feet again, hacks at the boy's tray, trying to hit his fingers...

The cuchillero fends him off with his tray. He kicks aside the bench, moving forward relentlessly, forcing John Grady back against the wall. John Grady slides away, along the wall, as the cuchillero pursues him, the two boys feinting, thrusting, blocking with their trays...

The men at the tables they're approaching begin to rise, one by one and silently, like birds leaving a wire. A big ring of spectators shifts constantly, keeping a safe distance...

One of the boy's passes cuts John Grady across the outside of his upper arm...

Another swipe leaves a bright stripe of blood across the back of his fingers, where they grip his tray edge...

Another thrust slips beneath his tray, slicing across his lower chest...

John Grady gasps, staring into the sweating face of his attacker...

The boy's black eyes glitter. He speaks no word. His movements are precise and without rancor...

John Grady gathers himself, lunging forward to stab, but the boy ducks under his outflung arm, crouching there for one frozen moment before leaping up again...

His knife passes across John Grady's chest, then back again, with incredible speed. Finally John Grady manages to deflect the blade with his tray, lurching backwards...

The boy crouches silently before him, faintly weaving, staring into John Grady's eyes, waiting for another opening...

John Grady's tray slips from his wet, bloody fingers, and clatters on the floor...

He puts his hands to his shirt, looking stupidly at the blood. He blinks for a moment at the cuchillero, puzzled.

Then he backs away, sagging slowly to the floor. His legs bend crookedly under him and he slumps against the wall, his arms splayed out. His eyes go blank.

The cuchillero stands looking down at him for a moment. Then he sets his tray quietly on the table, not even breathing very hard. He leans over and takes hold of John Grady by the hair and forces his head back to cut his throat and John Grady's knife in his bloody fingers leaps up from the floor and sinks deep into his heart.

A thin stream of bright blood spurts from the cuchillero's blue workshirt, as he looks at it for an instant. Then he drops to his knees and pitches forward into his enemy's arms, his dead eyes staring directly into the shocked face of John Grady.

John Grady rolls to one side, scrabbling for the cuchillero's knife. Seizing it, he pushes the dead boy away and gets a grip on a table's edge and pulls himself up. He staggers towards the doors of the mess hall, waving the knife in a vague way, as the silent convicts move aside. He unlatches the doors and lurches out into the deep blue twilight...

EXT. THE YARD - NIGHT

Light streams out behind him and several men come to the door, watching as he wobbles away. No one follows him out. He walks with great care, holding his abdomen. Circles of searchlights are spinning across the sand and one of them finds and loses him, seeks him again, holds his form as he pauses, swaying. From mid-chest to knees he is bright red. From somewhere a klaxon begins to sound. He sees the knife in his hand, throws it away. His eyes roll up in his head and he topples sideways, lying motionless on the sand...

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CLINIC - DAY

John Grady is asleep, his head resting on a thin pillow. His eyes flutter, then finally open. For a moment he is utterly disoriented. He lifts his head, looks down at his body...

He's wearing only a rough cotton gown, and beneath it his chest and abdomen are heavily bandaged. Blood has seeped through and dried. He's lying on an iron cot in a bare stone room with a closed door. One naked bulb on the ceiling.

The effort of lifting his head has exhausted him. He sags

back onto the pillow and his eyes shut...

FADE TO:

INT. SAME - ANOTHER DAY

An ORDERLY in stained and wrinkled khakis is setting down a mess tray at the foot of his bed. On it are a glass of orange soda-water and a bowl of gruel. Beyond him the door is open; part of a corridor can be seen.

John Grady's voice is a hoarse whisper.

JOHN GRADY

Lacey Rawlins...

The orderly looks at him blankly.

JOHN GRADY

Dónde esta... mi compadre?

The orderly turns away without answering, goes out the door, closing it behind him.

John Grady stares weakly at the door...

FADE TO:

INT. SAME - DAYS LATER

John Grady is lying awake while a DOCTOR in a blue suit and tie, with a stethoscope and a leather bag, sits on the side of his cot, peering under his bandages. As his fingers delicately probe, we catch a glimpse of the angry red sutures. The doctor smiles.

DOCTOR

Bueno. Bueno.

He straightens, closing his bag.

DOCTOR

You are a fasthealer.

JOHN GRADY

A what?

DOCTOR

A fasthealer.

John Grady reaches out, clutching his sleeve.

JOHN GRADY

Rawlins. Mi compadre. Is he alive?

The doctor looks at him for a moment, uncertain what he is allowed to say. Then he gently pulls his sleeve free.

DOCTOR

I will send for you soap and towels.
So you can wash yourself.

He rises and goes. John Grady stares after him helplessly...

FADE TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

John Grady walks stiffly, carefully down a corridor, flanked by a pair of GUARDS. He is wearing his own clothes and boots again; someone has washed out the blood, stitched his shirt.

INT. COMMANDANTE'S OFFICE

The guards usher John Grady into a small office. The prison's COMMANDANTE looks up from his desk. A man in his 50s with a green khaki uniform, glasses, oiled hair. He nods curtly.

COMMANDANTE

You be seated.

John Grady sits, in painful slow motion. The comandante opens his drawer, takes out an envelope. He slides it across the desk. John Grady hesitates, then takes it. He looks inside...

The envelope is stuffed with crisp new peso notes.

John Grady looks up at the man, confused.

COMMANDANTE

You are fortunate boys.

JOHN GRADY

Rawlins...? He's alive?

COMMANDANTE

He wait outside for you.

John Grady is near tears, but doesn't want this man to see.

JOHN GRADY

Where are we going?

COMMANDANTE

You going away. You going to you house.
A los Estados Unidos.

John Grady stares at him. This might possibly be a dream.

JOHN GRADY

When?

COMMANDANTE

Now. I dont want to see you no more.

EXT. PRISON GATES - DAY

The ironshod wooden portal opens, and John Grady steps outside, blinking in the bright sunlight. The portal closes behind him. He turns, looking around uncertainly...

Rawlins is sitting nearby on a bus stop bench. He rises unsteadily as John Grady crosses. They stand looking at each other. A long pause.

RAWLINS

I thought you'd died.

JOHN GRADY

I thought you had.

RAWLINS

What happened?

JOHN GRADY

Later. Let's just sit here. Let's not talk.

He winces, trying to sit, and Rawlins has to ease him down onto the bench. He sits beside him. John Grady whispers.

JOHN GRADY

Let's just sit here real quiet.

They sit together on the bench in the sunlight, pale and gaunt, looking shrunken inside their clothes. Rawlins reaches out a trembling hand and John Grady clutches it...

INT. CAFE - DAY

The boys are in a wooden booth towards the back of a small cafe. Rawlins stares into his coffee cup.

RAWLINS

Why aint we dead?

JOHN GRADY

She paid us out.

He puts the envelope of pesos on the table. Rawlins looks at it, a long moment. Then he looks at John Grady.

RAWLINS

The old señora?

JOHN GRADY

The great aunt. Yes.

RAWLINS

Why?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know.

He lights a cigarette. Rawlins looks at the money again.

RAWLINS

It's got to do with the girl, dont it?

JOHN

I expect it does.

A WAITER brings them two plates with steaks, fried potatoes. He sets them down and goes. Rawlins picks up his knife and fork, then puts them down again. He looks at John Grady, who is staring out the window. Rawlins is scared and upset.

RAWLINS

You're goin back down there, aint you.

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. I guess I am.

RAWLINS

On account of the girl?

JOHN GRADY

The girl, yes. And our horses.

RAWLINS

You think she's lookin for you to come back?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know.

RAWLINS
What about Rocha?

JOHN GRADY
He'll have to do whatever he has
to do.

Rawlins looks at his food again. He looks up trembling.

RAWLINS
Dont go down there.

JOHN GRADY
I done made up my mind.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A breeze rustles the thin curtains of a cheap hotel room. Outside the window a portion of its neon sign can be seen. The boys sit on their twin beds, smoking, in semi-darkness. A silence, as of something terrible just related and still being weighed.

JOHN GRADY
I never thought I'd do that. Kill
a person... His eyes were right on
mine when he died. I cant stop see-
in his eyes.

RAWLINS
You didnt have no choice.

JOHN GRADY
I know. But you didnt do it.

Rawlins looks at him. John Grady stares quietly into the darkness. Finally Rawlins speaks again.

RAWLINS
There's only one kind of deal I can
see that Alejandra could of made
with that old woman.

JOHN GRADY
I know. But she's goin to have to
tell me herself.

RAWLINS
If she does will you come back?

JOHN GRADY
Yeah. I'll come back.

RAWLINS

All right.

JOHN GRADY

I still want our horses.

Rawlins shakes his head and looks away, upset.

JOHN GRADY

I aint askin you to go with me.

RAWLINS

I know you aint.

JOHN GRADY

You'll be all right.

RAWLINS

Yeah. I know.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

A line of PASSENGERS is boarding a bus whose sign reads "Nuevo Laredo." Many of them are women with small children and bundles; one woman has a cage with chickens. Other busses and passengers can be seen beyond...

Back along the concrete platform, Rawlins is the last person in this line. John Grady is with him. They've bought new clothes and hats, and Rawlins carries a small knapsack. He wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.

RAWLINS

Aw shit.

JOHN GRADY

What?

RAWLINS

Nothin. Just shit.

JOHN GRADY

What is it?

RAWLINS

I keep thinkin about old Blevins. I
keep thinkin about how scared he was.

John Grady doesn't answer. Rawlins looks at him. His eyes are wet and he looks very old and sad.

JOHN GRADY
You'll feel better when you get home.

RAWLINS
I dont think so.

John Grady watches him for a moment.

JOHN GRADY
I aint Blevins.

RAWLINS
I know you aint. But I wonder how
much better off you are than him.

John Grady considers this. By now they've reached the door of the bus, where its DRIVER is punching tickets. He watches impatiently as Rawlins pauses and the two boys stand looking at each other. Rawlins tries to smile. He clears his throat.

RAWLINS
Well. I reckon I'll see you one of
these old days.

JOHN GRADY
You take care.

RAWLINS
Yeah. You take care too.

They shake hands. Then Rawlins turns, hands his ticket to the driver, who punches it and hands it back. Rawlins climbs aboard.

John Grady watches as he makes his way along the aisle and finds a seat. He sits stiffly with his backpack clutched tightly on his lap; he stares down at this and cannot bear to look again at John Grady. After a few moments the bus starts up and begins to pull away...

Standing alone on the platform, John Grady watches the bus make its way out into the street, where it quickly recedes. He stands there for a long time, even after the bus has vanished from his sight...

FADE TO:

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAYS LATER

A flatbed truck slows to a stop. Sitting in its back, amidst tools and sacks, are many MIGRANT WORKERS. John Grady climbs down from it, holding a knapsack. He is much stronger, nearly

recovered. As the truck pulls away, he waves to the workers and some wave back, calling out cheerfully. He turns, hesitates, looking at...

The rose-covered main gate of La Purisima. The gate is open and the hacienda can be seen in the distance...

He shoulders his knapsack, starts down the dusty drive.

INT. HACIENDA - LIBRARY

John Grady stands waiting, his hat in his hands, beneath the tall portrait of the young Alfonsa. He hears brisk steps approaching in the hall and turns as she enters. They look at each other. She is dressed with a chilling elegance.

ALFONSA

Hector said that you would not come here. I assured him he was wrong.

JOHN GRADY

When is he coming back?

ALFONSA

He will not be back for some time. In any event he will not see you. Alejandra is at her mother's house.

JOHN GRADY

I think I'm owed an explanation.

ALFONSA

I think the accounts have been settled quite in your favor. You have been a great disappointment to my nephew and a considerable expense to me.

JOHN GRADY

No offense, ma'am, but I've been some inconvenienced myself.

She considers this for a moment. Then she crosses the room and sits, indicating the chair opposite.

ALFONSA

Sit down please.

John Grady sits. He puts his hat on a side table. A pause.

ALFONSA

The officers were here once before, you know. My nephew sent them away

ALFONSA (contd.)
until he was able to have his own
investigation conducted. He wanted
so much to go on believing in you.

JOHN GRADY
Why didnt he say somethin to me?

ALFONSA
He'd given his word to the policia.

JOHN GRADY
I should have been let to tell my
side of it.

ALFONSA
You had already lied to him once. Why
should he not assume you would do so
again?

JOHN GRADY
I never lied to him.

ALFONSA
The affair of the stolen horse was
known here even before you arrived.
The thieves were known to be American.
When he questioned you about this you
denied everything.

John Grady looks down, silent for a moment.

JOHN GRADY
Why did you buy me out of prison?

ALFONSA
I think you know why.

JOHN GRADY
Because of Alejandra.

ALFONSA
Yes.

JOHN GRADY
And what did she have to give in
return?

ALFONSA
I think you know that also.

JOHN GRADY

That she wont have nothin more to do with me.

ALFONSA

Yes.

JOHN GRADY

You didnt have the right. You should have left me there.

ALFONSA

You would have died.

JOHN GRADY

Then I'd of died.

They sit in silence. The hall clock ticks.

ALFONSA

We're willing that you should have a horse. I'll trust Estéban to supervise the selection. Do you have enough money?

JOHN GRADY

I'd of thought maybe the disappointments in your own life might have made you more sympathetic to other people.

ALFONSA

You would have thought wrongly.

She leans forward. Her eyes are bright, piercing.

ALFONSA

In January I will be seventy-three years old. My grandniece is the only future I contemplate and where she is concerned I will brook no duplicity. I should have been more wary where you were concerned. I should have seen you more clearly. Now I do.

JOHN GRADY

You wont let me make my case.

ALFONSA

I know your case. Your case is that certain things happened over which you had no control.

JOHN GRADY

It's true.

ALFONSA

I'm sure it is. But I've no sympathy with people to whom things happen. It may be that their luck is bad, but is that to count in their favor? No. No. What's done cannot be undone.

John Grady rises, picking up his hat.

JOHN GRADY

I intend to see her.

ALFONSA

Am I supposed to be surprised?

She smiles without humor, then rises. She crosses to the desk, reaches for a slip of paper and a thin gold pen.

ALFONSA

I'll even give you my permission. Although that seems to be a thing you have never required...

She jots something on the paper, then holds it out.

ALFONSA

Her telephone number.

John Grady looks at her, a long moment, disturbed by such cool certainty. Then he crosses to her, takes the slip.

ALFONSA

In the end, Mr. Cole, we all come to be cured of our sentiments. She will not break her word to me. You will see.

He looks back at her steadily, undaunted.

JOHN GRADY

Yes ma'am. We will.

INT. BARN - DAY

John Grady walks down the familiar cool dark bay, looking at the horses one after another. The prize stallion comes forward in his stall, recognizing him. John Grady stops to rub him and the horse whinnies and tosses his head, pushing his long sleek nose against the boy's chest. For a moment

John Grady is lost in memories, in sadness. Then he becomes aware of someone watching. He turns...

Estéban, the old groom, is standing nearby. He looks at the boy for a long moment, expressionless, then turns away, going into his room...

John Grady is further saddened. He takes a last look around, as though to fix this place in memory.

EXT. BARNYARD

The paint mustang, the one that Rawlins first challenged John Grady to break, stands waiting patiently while the boy adjusts his bridle. John Grady looks up, surprised...

Estéban stands in the barn doorway, holding John Grady's Hamley saddle, the one his father gave him. Over his shoulder he has John Grady's saddlebags. The old man's eyes are shining.

He crosses to the boy and together they sling the saddle onto the paint's blanketed back, then the saddlebags. John Grady touches the fine tooling of the leather, amazed and happy to see it again. He opens a saddlebag and sees the butt of his grandfather's pistol. He looks at Estéban gratefully. The old man's wrinkled face breaks into a wonderful smile.

EXT. HACIENDA GATE

Mounted, John Grady walks the paint towards the open gate, pulling up on the reins as he reaches it. He looks back over his shoulder...

The old groom stands in the dirt drive, a hundred feet away, watching him. He takes off his hat, holding it over his heart.

John Grady sweeps his own hat down from his head. Then after a long moment he puts it on again, turns his horse out into the road and rides away, leaving La Purisima forever...

EXT. LA VEGA - GRANGE HALL - DAY

John Grady rides up to the grange where he and Alejandra once danced. Some MEN are unloading sacks from a pickup, and pause to look at him curiously as he dismounts, ties the paint to a hitching post. He walks through the open doors, passing worn, stencilled letters that say "Telefono."

INT. ALEJANDRA'S HOUSE - MEXICO CITY

A uniformed MAID stands by a hall table, anxiously holding a phone receiver. On the table is a beautiful array of cut flowers; above it is an antique gilt mirror. The maid looks relieved when Alejandra hurries up to her, taking the phone. Waiting until the maid is gone, Alejandra holds the receiver to her ear.

ALEJANDRA
I knew it would be you.

INT. GRANGE

John Grady sits in a wooden booth, gripping his own receiver tightly. Beyond him is the big hall, stacked with bags and wooden pallets. Dust motes hang in the sunlight.

JOHN GRADY
I have to see you.

INTERCUTTING -

ALEJANDRA
I cant.

JOHN GRADY
You have to. I'm coming down there.

ALEJANDRA
No. You cant.

JOHN GRADY
I'm leaving in the morning. I'm in
La Vega.

ALEJANDRA
Did you talk to my aunt?

JOHN GRADY
Yes.

Alejandra is silent, fighting tears. She looks down the hallway, afraid her mother will come by.

ALEJANDRA
I cant see you.

JOHN GRADY
Yes you can.

ALEJANDRA

I won't be here. I go to La Purisima in two days.

JOHN GRADY

I'll meet you at the train.

ALEJANDRA

No. My father will have men there.

His eyes close. His voice is close to breaking.

JOHN GRADY

Alejandra, I love you. You had no right to make that promise. Even if they killed me, you had no right. I won't leave without seeing you. Even if it's the last time ever. Even if they kill me now.

She looks up, catching a glimpse of her own haunted face in the mirror. A long pause.

ALEJANDRA

I'll leave a day early. Tomorrow morning. I'll say that my aunt is ill. Meet me in Torreon.

She hangs up, as if suddenly afraid of the phone itself.

In his booth, John Grady looks at his own receiver. Then gently he replaces it in its cradle...

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Below a sign that says "Torreón", a train creaks slowly to a stop, steam blowing and brakes squealing, alongside a crowded platform. Its wooden doors open and PASSENGERS begin to emerge...

John Grady, standing by a pillar, watches anxiously lest he miss Alejandra in the crowd. After a few moments his eyes locate her...

A PORTER is helping her down from the train, then handing back her small leather suitcase. When she turns, walking towards him, she is achingly beautiful. She wears a blue dress with a skirt almost to her ankles, and a wide-brimmed blue hat. She stops when she sees him. She looks like a different person: no longer a girl but a woman, enduring some profound sorrow.

He walks up to her and she leans to kiss his cheek. He kisses her on the lips, lightly, and takes her suitcase.

ALEJANDRA
You are so thin.

JOHN GRADY
You're very beautiful.

She smiles at him sadly.

ALEJANDRA
Are you all right?

JOHN GRADY
Yes. I'm all right.

ALEJANDRA
And Lacey?

JOHN GRADY
He's okay. He's gone home. I'll get us a cab.

ALEJANDRA
No. Let's walk.

They walk out through the small terminal, past a newsstand and flower sellers, and as they walk she takes his arm.

INT. HOTEL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Well-dressed DINERS at nearby tables glance curiously at the elegant young woman who is silently weeping, and at the gaunt boy in the denim jacket who reaches out to take her hand. Their food and coffee have hardly been touched.

ALEJANDRA
It's all my fault...

JOHN GRADY
No. You couldnt have saved us. You couldnt have saved Blevins.

She shakes her head. She looks up at him.

ALEJANDRA
I told my father we were lovers.

He looks back at her, stunned. His voice is faint, lost.

JOHN GRADY

Told him...? Why?

ALEJANDRA

Because she threatened me. My aunt. She told me that I must stop seeing you or she would tell him. I couldn't stand for her to have that power. I told him myself.

He stares at the table. His and Rawlins' arrests. Their imprisonment and beatings and near-deaths. His head is spinning. He looks up at her again.

JOHN GRADY

What did he say?

ALEJANDRA

Nothing. He said nothing. He got up from the table. He went to his room.

JOHN GRADY

You told him at the table?

ALEJANDRA

Yes.

JOHN GRADY

In front of her?

ALEJANDRA

Yes.

JOHN GRADY

How could you tell him?

ALEJANDRA

I don't know. I was so foolish. It was her arrogance. I told her I would not be blackmailed. She made me crazy. But I broke my father's heart. I broke his heart.

JOHN GRADY

Why didn't he kill me?

ALEJANDRA

I don't know. I think he was afraid that I would take my own life.

JOHN GRADY

Would you?

ALEJANDRA

I dont know. He had Armando lock me into my room so that I couldnt warn you. The next morning he flew me back to the city. I thought I would never - never see you again...

She sobs silently, just her shoulders moving and tears running down her face. People are looking towards their table.

JOHN GRADY

Dont cry, Alejandra. Dont cry.

ALEJANDRA

I destroyed everything. I only wanted to die.

JOHN GRADY

Dont cry. I'll make it right.

ALEJANDRA

You cant.

JOHN GRADY

I'll make it right. Somehow I will. You have to let me.

ALEJANDRA

You dont understand.

JOHN GRADY

What dont I understand?

She looks up at him. He has never seen such terrible despair.

ALEJANDRA

I didnt know that he would stop loving me. I didnt know he could. Now I know.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - NIGHT

John Grady is lying in bed, asleep. Outside it is raining. A flash of lightning wakes him, and he looks up...

Alejandra stands at the open window, naked except for his shirt. The curtains are blowing around her. Another flash of lightning. She turns, looks at him. She is pale and scared.

ALEJANDRA

I saw you in a dream. I saw you dead in a dream.

JOHN GRADY

Just now?

ALEJANDRA

No. Long ago. Before any of this.

She comes to the bed and sits. She reaches out, tracing the ugly red lines on his bare chest. She whispers.

ALEJANDRA

Hice una manda, Juan.

JOHN GRADY

You made a promise.

ALEJANDRA

Yes.

JOHN GRADY

For my life.

ALEJANDRA

Yes. You were lying in the desert. It was dawn. Men in serapes stood over you, and you were dying. Con más razón tu puta.

He puts his hand to her mouth.

JOHN GRADY

Dont say that. You cant say that. I want you to marry me.

She looks at him, her eyes welling, but doesn't answer.

JOHN GRADY

We'll go back to Texas. We'll make a life together and be safe. Alejandra, I love you. I'll love you until the day I die.

She takes his hand and holds it in hers and kisses it.

ALEJANDRA

I believe you.

She touches his face, then leans close to him and kisses his lips, very tenderly. He returns her embrace...

EXT. STREET - DAWN

John Grady buys a bunch of flowers from a young VENDOR, giv-

ing the boy a coin. He is exuberant, almost giddy....

INT. HOTEL STAIRCASE

He runs up the steps, taking them two at a time, clutching the flowers. His boots echo in the stairwell...

INT. HOTEL ROOM

He pushes through the door of his room, about to speak, when something he sees stops him in his tracks...

Alejandra, fully dressed, is sitting on the edge of the bed. Her suitcase, packed and closed, rests by her feet. In her face is an unbearable sadness.

ALEJANDRA

I cannot do what you ask. I love you. But I cannot.

JOHN GRADY

Alejandra -

ALEJANDRA

I have no honor, except my promise.
If I lose that too, then who am I?
What am I...?

He looks back at her, helpless tears in his eyes. She rises and comes to him and kisses him. She puts her face against his shoulder. Her voice is a sob.

ALEJANDRA

Mi amor... mi corazón.

His own face, seen over her head, is utterly stricken. They cling to one another in the wreckage of their lives.

The flowers slip from his fingers...

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

In dreamlike SLOW MOTION, a series of images, shivering and slightly BLURRED:

A CONDUCTOR raises his whistle to his lips, but we hear no sound. PASSENGERS crowd past him into the coaches, while others depart the train to greet FAMILIES or FRIENDS. We see their mouths open in happy shouts, but cannot hear them...

We watch a FATHER swoop up a LITTLE GIRL into his arms, whirling her around and around as she laughs...

Alejandra and John Grady stand beside one another on the platform. She turns away, bends to pick up her suitcase. She leans and kisses him one last time, both of their faces wet with tears. Then she turns and disappears into the nearest coach as he stands staring after her...

The father sets his little girl down and as he does so she looks up into John Grady's face and stops laughing...

Helpless tears stream down his face...

The father, with a wary glance at the rigid young American, pulls his daughter away by her hand, the little girl still looking back over her shoulder at him...

The train begins to pull away in clouds of steam...

He has a final glimpse of Alejandra, her face pale and lost behind its glass, diminishing with distance, diminishing, diminishing, as...

The station itself begins to spin around him, all its colors and textures and shapes, the very air seeming to fracture into a dizzy, mindless, numbing whirl...

EXT. A STREET - NIGHT - RAINING

The shivering spinning SLOW MOTION continues as we see John Grady stagger out through the door of a bar, holding a nearly empty tequila bottle. We catch a glimpse of smoky haze, red lights, a jukebox; we hear raucous music, distorted and strange. He lurches a few yards down the cobbled street, then stops, realizing he is lost. And then not caring. He stands swaying in the driving rain, and the bottle slips from his fingers. He looks down at the broken mess for a few moments, then drops to his knees. He is fumbling with the pieces of glass, trying to fit them together again, when he finally loses consciousness. He sags onto his side and lies in the street, eyes shut, as the rain pelts him...

FADE TO:

EXT. STABLE ALLEY - DAY

A TEENAGED BOY leads the paint, already saddled, out through a door in a corrugated iron wall. John Grady is sitting on an empty crate in the alleyway, slumped under his hat. The boy has to crouch beside him, giving him a worried poke in the shoulder, before John Grady even looks up. He is pale, red-eyed, unshaven; the boy is almost frightened of him.

EXT. A STREET IN TORREON - DAY

Mounted now, John Grady walks the paint down a narrow city street. A line of cars and trucks has stacked up behind him, and their annoyed DRIVERS blow their horns, laughing and whistling as he struggles to control the nervous horse...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Across a great expanse of range country, broken into small hills and arroyos, we watch the distant figure of the boy and horse as they ride...

EXT. CROSSROADS - NIGHT - BRIGHT MOONLIGHT

Slumping wearily in his saddle, John Grady plods through a barren crossroads, stopping the horse as he reaches a signpost. As he stares at this, he realizes he's passed this way before, as a prisoner with Rawlins. He looks around, remembering. Then he looks again at the sign...

One of its many wooden slats says "Los Estados Unidos 512 km." It points north, the direction he's headed. But lower down, another arrow, a familiar one, reads "La Encantada 107 km." This arrow points west.

As John Grady stares at the sign, struggling to reach a decision, he hears Rawlins' voice.

RAWLINS (V.O.)

I'll say one thing for him...

JOHN GRADY (V.O.)

What's that?

RAWLINS (V.O.)

The little son of a bitch wouldnt stand still for nobody highjackin his horse.

John Grady looks once more, in brief yearning, towards the safety of the north. Then he leans and spits. He turns his horse and heads west instead, towards Encantada.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAWN

John Grady crouches on a rise, looking down at...

The sleeping village. Here and there an early lamp shows at a window. Thin spires of smoke rise from the houses.

He rises, walks back to the mustang. He lifts the flap of a

saddlebag, takes out his grandfather's Colt. He opens the cylinder gate, spins the cylinder to check his load, then snaps the gate shut. He looks back towards the pueblo...

EXT. THE JAIL

The captain rides a horse down the dusty street, as a thin dog slinks across his path. He reaches the familiar adobe jailhouse, with its empty bellcot, and dismounts.

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE

The captain comes inside, mail under his arm, key ring in one hand, thermos in the other... and stops short.

John Grady is sitting behind his desk. He holds his pistol with its butt resting on the desktop.

JOHN GRADY

Cierra la puerta.

The captain's eyes dart towards a broken window, as he sees how the boy got in. Then they shift to the open door. John Grady stands. He cocks the pistol. The captain shuts the door slowly with his elbow.

CAPTAIN

What do you want?

JOHN GRADY

I come to get our horses.

CAPTAIN

I dont have you horses.

JOHN GRADY

You by God know where they're at, though.

CAPTAIN

You make bad troubles for you self.

JOHN GRADY

Mister, I got troubles you never even heard of.

INT. JAIL CELL

Orlando, the old prisoner, looks up as his cell door is unlocked. The captain is pushed in, stumbling, and John Grady follows, holding both his own gun and the captain's automatic. Orlando stands up slowly, blinking his one good eye

in surprise.

JOHN GRADY

Ya estás, viejo?

The old man hesitates, looking uneasily at the captain.

ORLANDO

Si, cómo no.

JOHN GRADY

You're free to go. Andale.

He waves the gun towards the open door. Finally understanding, the old man breaks into a shy grin.

ORLANDO

Gracias, mi compañero.

As Orlando passes in front of the captain, the captain makes a quick contemptuous head feint at him, hissing, and the old man jumps. The captain laughs. The boy touches Orlando's arm.

JOHN GRADY

Vaya con Dios.

The old man nods. He looks at the captain again, his bright eye burning with hatred, then goes.

EXT. STREET

The captain, his face now expressionless, rides slowly through the center of town. A towrope is tied to his saddle; it stretches behind him for several yards to...

The paint mustang's bridle. John Grady slumps despondently in his saddle, his hands "cuffed" before him, to all appearances a prisoner. He glances under his hat brim towards...

A pair of OLD WOMEN, out sweeping the mud street in the early morning light. The women pause, watching them pass.

EXT. HACIENDA - COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

In hot, mid-morning sunlight, the two riders turn off a dirt road and still in procession pass through the open gate of a hacienda. We recognize this place: the ranch of the charro who wanted to kill Blevins. The riders are soon attended by dogs, who prance and bark and run before their horses.

At the corral gate they halt, John Grady easing his paint up beside the captain's horse. He removes his unlocked cuffs,

stuffing them in a pocket, then slips the captain's automatic from his belt. He looks around...

The main house is quiet, though smoke rises from a breakfast fire... The scattered outbuildings are quiet also... Here and there trucks are parked, horse and cattle trailers. No one has appeared yet. The dogs are losing interest; some of them drift away while others sit in the dust panting.

INT. BARN

At gunpoint, John Grady pushes the captain ahead of him into the barn bay. He is leading the horses by their reins, and pauses to twist these around an upright. The captain stops by a stall, looking back at him. John Grady moves cautiously past him into the semi-darkness...

The doors at the far end are closed. Many horses are snuffling in the stalls; pigeons coo in the loft overhead.

John Grady makes a sound with his teeth.

JOHN GRADY

Redbo?

After a moment his horse sticks its head out of a stall at the other end of the barn. Redbo nickers excitedly.

As John Grady smiles, a shadow blocks out part of the light. He turns...

A MAN has stepped into the doorway behind them. He stands in silhouette thirty feet away.

MAN

Quién esta?

John Grady moves quickly to the captain's side, partially shielded by him, puts the gun in his ribs, and mutters.

JOHN GRADY

Respóndele.

CAPTAIN

Raúl. El capitán.

The man stands waiting uncertainly. John Grady mutters.

JOHN GRADY

Tenemos un preso. Tenemos que ver un caballo.

CAPTAIN

Tenemos un preso. Tenemos que ver
un caballo.

MAN

Cual caballo?

CAPTAIN

El caballo americano.

The man shifts his weight. Then he steps abruptly out of the doorway light. From around the corner he calls again.

MAN

Que pasó, hombre?

They don't answer. John Grady is staring towards...

The man's shadow, stretching across the sunlit ground beyond the stable door. After a few moments the shadow withdraws.

John Grady turns and shoves the captain up against the wooden wall, the muzzle at his cheek. With his free hand he yanks the captain's left wrist behind his back, snapping the handcuffs on it. Then his right wrist. The captain winces.

CAPTAIN

Bien, bien...

JOHN GRADY

Vámonos.

EXT. BARN

A MAN with a rifle is crouching to one side of the open doors. As the paint mustang suddenly thunders out past him, he reacts in surprise, turning the rifle towards it before he realizes the horse is unsaddled and riderless.

As he turns back towards the door John Grady materializes, putting the barrel of the automatic between his eyes. The man drops the rifle in the dirt and is raising his hands when there's a sharp crack in the distance and John Grady is slammed to the ground. More gunshots, dirt kicking up, as the other man also dives to the ground...

A flock of pigeons bursts flapping from the gables above...

John Grady rolls to the safety of the doorway, the other man crawling right behind him, as more bullets chew into the dirt and the barn wall. When the man reaches back for his fallen rifle, John Grady yanks him backwards by his collar,

then strains around him to grab the rifle himself. He leans back into the shadows, laying the rifle to one side...

Behind them, his tethered horses are going crazy. Redbo is now saddled, and rears up next to Rawlins' gray horse, Junior, as well as Blevins' huge bay. The captain, squatting handcuffed in the dirt, is trapped among the terrified animals, and frantically tries to roll to safety as their hooves flash above his face...

Ignoring the chaos behind him, John Grady holds the automatic across the shoulder of the terrified man he disarmed. He cocks it. The shooting from outside has slackened, for the moment, echoes fading. Panting, John Grady looks down at his own leg...

He's been shot through the left thigh; it looks bad. His pants are dark with blood and there's blood on the dirt.

Looking up, he stares out across the barn lot, trying to locate his assailants...

Corral fence... sheds... ranchhouse in the distance. At first there is no sign of them, then... stop. Right there. One SHOOTER is kneeling on the bed of a truck, a hundred feet away, with the barrel of his rifle resting on top of the cab...

John Grady aims his pistol at him, fires -

- but misses him, as the man ducks down, watching him now through the rear window of the cab and the windshield.

John Grady cocks and levels the pistol and...

Shoots a hole in the windshield, then a second hole, as the shooter vaults hastily out of the truck, hiding on its far side.

John Grady lowers his aim, fires again...

Blowing out one of the truck's tires, then another. As the tires hiss and the truck begins to settle, the shooter runs from behind it across the open ground, taking cover behind a shed just as John Grady's sixth bullet showers splinters off its corner...

John Grady squeezes his trigger again; the gun clicks empty. He tosses it aside, yanking his old Colt from his belt and cocking it. The man kneeling in front of him, his face mashed against the doorpost, sobs with fear.

MAN

Esta loco.

JOHN GRADY

I got reasons to be.

He becomes aware of moaning from behind them. He turns...

The captain is on his knees, hunched over. He's lost his hat; his lank black hair hangs down and he's bleeding from one temple. The horses have stopped rearing, but still pull at their reins and step nervously.

John Grady turns back, stares out across the lot, desperately calculating the odds. Finally he prods the man with his revolver, motions him to move back towards the captain.

JOHN GRADY

Ayúdalo.

EXT. HORSE TRAILER - MINUTES LATER

The charro, whom we recognize, is standing behind the corner of an aluminum trailer, eighty feet from the barn door. He's gripping a shotgun but it doesn't make him feel much braver. TWO VAQUEROS kneel beside him, holding rifles; they look considerably more capable. They all stare towards...

The empty barn door. No noise from there, no stirring. A long pause.

The charro licks his lips, then stares across the lot at...

The shooter crouched behind the shed, who waves back to show his alertness...

MORE VAQUEROS are in firing positions behind a stack of hay bales... behind a concrete watering trough... inside a cattle truck, their barrels poking through the slats...

A sound from the barn makes the charro turn that way. His men tense up, aiming their rifles...

Three horses trot out into the sunlight, in line abreast. John Grady is on Redbo and he's flanked - shielded - by the captain on Junior and the disarmed vaquero on the captain's horse. Blevins' bay trails them on a long towrope, tied to John Grady's saddle...

The three riders are so tightly bunched that their knees touch. The captain's hands are still cuffed behind him, and the vaquero is similarly bound with rope. John Grady grips

all three reins in his left fist; the revolver is cocked and poised in his right hand, the rifle tucked under his good leg. The vaquero is screeching.

VAQUERO

No tire! No me mate!

Behind the hay bales, the other vaqueros are levelling their guns, but as we...

Look down their barrels, we see they don't have a clear shot.

VAQUERO

Madre de Dios, no me mate!

At the horse trailer, it's the same frustration. One of the men is about to snap off a shot anyway, but the charro pushes his barrel down. He takes a step or two forward, his face dark with rage. But he can only watch as...

The riders clear the hacienda gate, moving faster, cross the road, and head into the open desert in a cloud of dust.

EXT. DESERT

John Grady and his hostages canter across the plain, heading for a far ridgeline. He's tucked away the revolver. Pulling with both fists on the three sets of reins, he manages with a great effort to stop all four horses. He turns, staring back over his shoulder...

The hacienda is still visible in the distance, shimmering in the heat waves. A cloud of dust shows that pursuit has formed up and is coming.

John Grady turns to the vaquero, who is mounted on the captain's horse. He drapes that set of reins over the saddle.

JOHN GRADY

Adios.

He whacks the horse on its rump and it goes tearing off over the plain, away from John Grady's intended path. The bound vaquero shouts with fear, lurching to stay on.

John Grady rides to the captain's side, leans over, unlocks one handcuff, then hands him his reins. The man is too exhausted and miserable even to show much surprise.

JOHN GRADY

You ride in front of me. Stay close
or I'll shoot you.

The captain looks at the boy's thigh...

A crude bandage, made from shirt strips, has soaked through. The whole pants leg is dark with blood; more can be seen dripping to the sand.

The captain looks up at him.

CAPTAIN

You going to die.

JOHN GRADY

You just keep smilin. When I die
you die.

He pulls the Colt out, cocks it. The captain stares at him a further moment, then turns Junior, riding towards the ridge-line. John Grady follows him, still towing Blevins' bay.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A baking sun hangs overhead...

The boy and the captain ride along, their heads sagging in exhaustion, over a trackless malpais, or lava flat. The drooping muzzles of their horses are white with foam. There is a thin distant echo of gunshots, and John Grady turns back for a moment, staring over his shoulder in puzzlement. His appearance is shocking.

The desert shimmers behind him: no sign of pursuers. Again that flat distant crack of rifles.

The captain looks up dully, through bloodshot eyes.

CAPTAIN

Que es esto?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. Keep movin.

As the two riders plod on again, drops of the boy's blood land on the dark stones...

EXT. CANYON - NIGHT

Below a starry sky, we see a little gully, shielded from view by tumbled boulders and the high brushy walls of its cliffs. At the end of this gully is a shallow stone basin of water, and the hobbled, unsaddled horses are drinking from this. Flickering light - a small fire - reflects off the water and the canyon walls...

John Grady's face is feverish, dripping sweat. He's hunched over by the fire, fighting dizziness...

His fumbling fingers pull the cylinder pin from the Colt. Then he removes the loaded cylinder itself, putting it in his pants pocket. He is naked from the waist up. He fans the flames higher with his hat, then shoves the barrel of the pistol deep into the glowing coals.

The captain sits ten feet away, his back to the boulders. His wrists are cuffed before him; his ankles tied with rope. He lifts a tin cup of water to his cracked lips, puzzling over the boy's actions. His eyes flick towards...

The rifle, propped against a saddle nearby.

He looks again at John Grady. His voice is a tired croak.

CAPTAIN

They will find you. In this place.

JOHN GRADY

We aint stayin here long.

He unbuckles his belt, then lowers his pants to his knees. It is very painful to peel them free of his wounds; he stifles a cry, sucking breath...

The captain watches him, not understanding...

John Grady grabs his shirt, which he has soaked with water, and carefully wipes away the crusted blood, revealing two neat holes on the outer edges of his thigh, front and rear: entrance and exit wounds. The skin around the holes is mottled blue and yellow, beginning to poison with infection.

The captain's eyes dart to the rifle again. Furtive under his greasy hanging hair. He looks back at John Grady.

CAPTAIN

I am sick. I cant ride no more.

JOHN GRADY

You'll be surprised at what you can do if you have to.

Picking up a piece of kindling, he jams it between his teeth. Then wrapping the wet shirt around his hands, he drags the pistol from the embers. The barrel tip glows. He holds it poised above one of the holes in his thigh. His desperate eyes meet the captain's, as...

The captain's eyes widen in shocked comprehension, and...

John Grady plunges the barrel down into his first wound.

The horses' heads jerk from the water as the boy's scream echoes from the canyon walls. Terrified, the horses rear, try to escape, but their hobbles hold. After a moment John Grady can be heard shouting a second time. The horses themselves are screaming, over and over and over. Their shadows dance crazily on the rocky cliff...

The captain, stunned, scrambles to his feet but falls sideways, sliding off the rocks...

Tossing the gun aside, John Grady flops full-length on the sand, shaking in agony. He crawls torturously towards the pool of water, dragging himself forward with his elbows...

The pool looks impossibly far away; his vision is starting to blur...

Finally John Grady reaches the pool, rolling sideways to get his leg into the water, boot and all. He is gasping for air, trying to push himself up on his palms, when he hears the loud click of the rifle being cocked...

The captain stands swaying weakly before him. The rope that bound his two boots now trails from one of them. He levels the rifle in his cuffed hands.

CAPTAIN

Vayase!

John Grady pushes himself up, somehow, his hands on the rocks. He's in the water to his knees. The captain comes closer, pushing the muzzle inches from John Grady's face.

CAPTAIN

Where is the keys?

JOHN GRADY

Boot... In my boot.

The captain waves the muzzle. John Grady reaches down into the black water, feeling about, and comes up with something in his closed fist...

When he opens his dripping fingers, he reveals a handful of rifle cartridges...

The captain pulls the trigger, but the rifle clicks uselessly, unloaded. As he reacts...

John Grady grabs the rifle barrel, yanks hard, pulling the captain off-balance. He falls into the water. For several long moments the two of them struggle, weakly but desperately, splashing and gasping, before John Grady manages to wrench away the rifle. Swinging the butt, he stuns the captain, who falls on his back onto the rocky ledge. John Grady straddles his waist, fumbling one of the cartridges into the rifle, then levers and cocks it and points it at the captain's face. The boy's eyes are crazed with pain, anger, exhaustion. He looks feral, half-mad...

The captain's eyes widen in terror...

John Grady's finger tightens on the trigger...

But then finally, after a long moment, something changes in his eyes. We know him again. He shakes his head.

JOHN GRADY

No. I aint goin to kill you. I'm not like you.

EXT. SAME - MOMENTS LATER

Scuffs in the sand show where the captain's been dragged away from the water. He lies on his stomach beside a saddle as John Grady kneels over him. The boy has buckled his pants again, pulled on his wet shirt. He fishes the chain of the handcuffs through the wooden stirrups. Then he locks the captain's wrists behind his back. John Grady gets to his feet, swaying. He's completely spent, gasping for breath.

JOHN GRADY

You're free to go. Just as far.
As you can tote. That saddle.

He turns, takes three tottering steps, sinks to his knees in the sand, and pitches forward unconscious by the fire...

FADE TO:

EXT. SAME - DAWN

John Grady is lying face-up by the cold ashes of the fire when a shadow falls across his face. His eyes flutter open...

THREE CAMPESINOS in serapes are standing over him, looking down. Tough, seamed, expressionless faces. All three wear pistols and one of the men is holding John Grady's rifle, calmly feeding cartridges into it.

CAMPESINO

Deme las llaves.

John Grady takes the keys from his pocket, hands them over. One of the campesinos takes them, crosses to the captain, unlocks his handcuffs. His face is a mask of pure terror. They haul him to his feet and march him whimpering past John Grady. As they reach another GROUP OF CAMPESINOS, who are standing by the boy's tethered horses, one man separates from this group and comes for a moment face to face to with the captain. The captain goes weak in the knees and his captors have to lift him by the elbows as they drag him away. Then the man walks over towards John Grady, smiling as he comes. It is Orlando.

As John Grady reacts, surprised...

Orlando takes the rifle from his comrade, levers a round into the chamber, then sets the rifle leaning against a flat rock. Sitting atop this rock are a sack of beans, a thick stack of tortillas, bound with string, a canteen, and a dead jackrabbit. Orlando straightens, looking again at the boy.

John Grady smiles at him, weakly, but he is shivering from cold and the aftereffects of fright: nearly in tears.

Orlando looses the serape from his own shoulders and swings it in a slow veronica, laying it over the boy's legs.

His men, remounted, are walking their horses up the draw; they pause as he crosses to them and mounts up. The captain is seated among them, his head hanging in despair. Orlando, his one eye gleaming, takes a long last look at the boy.

ORLANDO

Vaya con Dios.

John Grady nods. Orlando turns his horse and trots up the canyon, followed by his men with the captain. John Grady stares after them in amazement, half-certain that he is dreaming...

FADE TO:

EXT. A RIDGE - DAYS LATER

John Grady, wearing the serape, rides up to the crest of a ridge and pauses, sitting on Redbo. Junior and Blevins' bay pause beside them.

The Rio Grande curves before them, magnificently.

John Grady sits a long while, looking across at America.

EXT. PAVED ROAD - OUTSKIRTS OF LANGTRY, TEXAS - DAY

A dark sedan has pulled off the road, by a stalled pickup truck. A pair of MEN, bent under the open hood of the truck, look up as they hear the clopping of hooves. They are surprised to see...

A teenaged boy approaching, riding one horse and leading two others by their reins. The horses and rider are wet and dirty and tired, but the boy wears his hat and serape with such insouciant grace that he seems like an apparition out of the vanished past. He reins in.

JOHN GRADY

Howdy. I wonder if you all could
tell me what day this is?

The men look at each other. One wears a three-piece suit.

1ST MAN

It's Thursday.

JOHN GRADY

I mean the date.

The men look at him. The big Colt. The slung rifle. The three horses.

2ND MAN

It's Thanksgiving day.

John Grady thinks about that for moment, then looks up.

JOHN GRADY

Dont neither of you all want to
buy a rifle, do you?

The men shake their heads slowly. The boy nods again, touches his hat brim, then rides on, leading the horses.

As the men stare after him, one of them sets his hands on his hips in curiosity. This motion causes his suit lapel to fall open, revealing a silver star pinned to his vest.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

John Grady sits alone at the defense table in a dark panelled old courtroom as the man in the suit, a CONSTABLE, gets to his feet behind the prosecution table. His uniformed DEPUTY sits next to him.

CONSTABLE

Your honor, that was a mighty entertainin yarn. But the fact is, this boy aint got a lick of proof. And them horses show three different brands.

John Grady looks up steadily at the judge.

JOHN GRADY

I aint a liar, mister. Nor a thief.

The JUDGE, 71, whitehaired, bears a remarkable resemblance to John Grady's grandfather. He studies the boy solemnly.

JUDGE

Son, if you wouldnt find it too much of an embarrassment, and since there aint no women present, I'd like you to show the court them bulletholes in your leg.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir.

Stepping into the aisle, he unbuckles his belt and drops his trousers to his knees, turning his scarred and puckered wounds towards the judge. The judge's voice is gentle.

JUDGE

That's fine son. Thank you.

The constable looks at his deputy, dismayed. John Grady pulls up his trousers, buckles his belt. He sits.

JUDGE

Them are some nasty lookin holes. You didnt have no medical attention?

JOHN GRADY

No sir. There wasnt none to be had.

JUDGE

I guess not. You were lucky not to of got gangrene.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. I burnt em out pretty good.

JUDGE

Burnt em out...?

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. I burnt em out with a hot
pistolbarrel.

Absolute silence in the courtroom. The judge leans back.
When his voice finally comes it is soft but very firm.

JUDGE

Mr. Smith, you see this boy gets
his horses back. Son, you're free
to go and the court thanks you for
your testimony. Since I've sat on
this bench I've heard a lots of
things that give me grave doubts
about the human race. But this aint
one of em.

John Grady, surprised, can only nod his appreciation.

EXT. JUDGE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

The judge, wearing a flannel bathrobe over a tee shirt and
trousers, opens his front door, a bit surprised to see...

John Grady standing on his porch, his breath steaming in the
cold. The horses are tethered to a porch rail behind him.

JOHN GRADY

I dont like to bother you. But they
told me this was where you live.

JUDGE

It's all right, son. Come in.

John Grady shifts his weight, gripping his hat.

JUDGE

I aint comin out there.

INT. PARLOR

John Grady follows the old man into a room filled with
books. A fire is burning in the fireplace. A grayhaired
WOMAN rises as they enter.

JUDGE

Dixie, this is John Cole.

She smiles at the boy, then turn to the judge.

WOMAN

I'm goin up, Charles.

JUDGE

All right, Mama.

She goes out and the judge turns to John Grady.

JUDGE

Set down, son.

They both sit, John Grady putting his hat on his lap. The judge waits patiently. A whiskey decanter is at his elbow.

JOHN GRADY

I guess I just wanted to say, it kindly bothered me, what you said in court today... It was like I was in the right about everthing and I dont feel that way.

JUDGE

You didnt misrepresent nothin to me, did you?

JOHN GRADY

Nossir. But I worked for Señor Rocha and I respected him and he was awful good to me. And then I was the one that brought all the trouble about. Nobody but me.

JUDGE

And the girl.

John Grady looks at him. A pause.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. But we were in love. I reckon we still are. Someday I mean to see her again.

The judge nods. He pours two small tumblers of whiskey, re-stoppers the decanter.

JUDGE

There's somethin else, aint there?

JOHN GRADY

Yessir... When I was in the penitentiary down there I killed a boy.

JUDGE

Well. I'm sorry to hear that.

He takes a sip of whiskey.

JOHN GRADY

He come at me with a knife. I just happened to get the best of him. It keeps botherin me, somehow.

JUDGE

Why do you think that is?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. I dont know nothin about him. I never even knew his name. He could of been a pretty good ol boy.

He looks up. His eyes are wet in the firelight. The judge sits watching him.

JUDGE

You know he wasnt a pretty good old boy. Dont you?

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. I guess so... But later, I wanted to kill that otheren, too. That Mexican captain. And I wasnt even mad at him. Or I didnt feel like I was... That boy he shot, Blevins, I didnt hardly even know him. I mean, I felt bad about it. But he wasnt nothin to me.

JUDGE

Then why do you think you wanted to kill the man?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. Maybe there aint no answer. It just bothered me that you might think I was somethin special. I aint.

JUDGE

Well. I reckon that aint a bad way to be bothered.

John Grady nods, picks his hat up, turns it in his hands. He looks like he's about to rise. Instead his voice breaks, a sudden anguished outburst.

JOHN GRADY

The reason I wanted to kill him
was because I stood there and let
him walk that boy out in the trees
and shoot him and I never said
nothin. Not a word...

A silence. Hot tears in his eyes. The judge watches him.

JUDGE

Would it have done any good?

JOHN GRADY

No sir. But that dont make it right.
And it never will.

The judge leans from his chair and takes the poker standing
on the hearth and jostles the coals. He sets the poker down
again and looks at the boy.

JUDGE

Son, you strike me as somebody that
maybe tends to be a little hard on
theirselves. I think from what you
told me you done real well to get
out of there with a whole hide. Let
alone with them horses. Maybe the
best thing to do now might be to
just go on and put it behind you.
My daddy used to say, dont chew on
what's eatin you.

John Grady looks at him. The judge smiles, very gently.

JUDGE

There's nothin wrong with you son.
I think you'll get it sorted out.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. I guess I will. If I live.

EXT. PORCH

The judge stands on his porch in his robe and slippers while
John Grady unties Redbo and mounts up. The other two horses
are already strung in single file behind them. The boy and
the judge look at each other.

JOHN GRADY

I thank you for your time. And for
invitin me into your home and all.

JUDGE

You come back and visit any time.

JOHN GRADY

Yessir. I appreciate it.

He raises his hand and the judge raises a hand back. Then he turns the horses and starts away, into the darkness, as the judge stands in his porchlight watching him...

EXT. RAWLINS' FARM - DAY

Lacey Rawlins stands in a flock of turkeys, pouring feed from a bucket into a trough. It's a cold day; his face is red and his breath steams. He pauses, looking up...

In the distance, across the open prairie, a rider can be seen coming over a low rise, approaching the farm. One rider, but two... no, three horses. They are too far off to make out details, but something about the rider's easy grace... the way he and his horse seem to be one...

Staring, Lacey sets down his bucket. He begins to tremble.

LACEY

Sum buck. Sum buck...

EXT. THE PRAIRIE

John Grady, astride Redbo, canters towards the cluster of buildings. Junior and Blevins' bay are flanking him, untied now, all three horses running easily, even joyously, with their manes flowing in the wind. John Grady is grinning...

EXT. FARMYARD

John Grady rides into the lot and reins up before Rawlins, dismounting. The two boys stand looking at each other, while the horses stamp and blow. For a moment neither can speak.

JOHN GRADY

I figured you might want your old horse back.

RAWLINS

I caint believe it, bud. I caint believe it's you. Sum buck. Let me look at you.

He walks halfway around John Grady, staring at him. His eyes are moist. Then suddenly he flings his arms around John Grady in a bear hug, lifting him clean off the ground. They tussle

for a moment, laughing, before Rawlins sets him down again. They stare at each other, a little out of breath.

RAWLINS

Sum buck. I caint believe it. Sum buck.

INT. BARN

The horses are eating oats. Junior is back in his old stall; the other two are tethered nearby...

Rawlins and John Grady sit side by side on hay bales, their backs resting against the wall. John Grady sips coffee from Rawlins' thermos.

RAWLINS

Have you been to see your mama?

JOHN GRADY

No.

Rawlins hesitates, looking at his friend.

RAWLINS

Your daddy died. Maybe you already knew that.

John Grady is quiet for a long moment, looking into the mug.

JOHN GRADY

I think I must have.

RAWLINS

She tried to get word to you down in Mexico. We was all afraid you...

JOHN GRADY

Yeah.

A brief silence.

RAWLINS

What are you goin to do?

JOHN GRADY

Head out.

RAWLINS

Where to?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know.

He is looking at Blevins' bay. Rawlins follows his gaze.

JOHN GRADY

It all begun with that horse. The good times and the bad ones, too. If I can just find out where he really belongs, then maybe I can start over fresh. Maybe I'll belong somewheres too.

EXT. THE PRAIRIE

They have walked out a long way from the farm buildings. John Grady stands by Redbo, holding his reins. Rawlins has the reins of the bay.

RAWLINS

You could get on with the oil rigs. Pays awful good...

JOHN GRADY

Yeah. I know.

RAWLINS

You could stay here at the house, long as you want to. This is still good country.

JOHN GRADY

I know it is. But it aint my country.

He puts a boot in his stirrup, rises into Redbo's saddle. Then he reaches out his gloved hand for the reins of the Blevins horse. Rawlins hesitates, then hands them over.

RAWLINS

Where is your country?

JOHN GRADY

I dont know. I dont know where it is. I dont know what happens to country.

Rawlins is silent.

JOHN GRADY

I'll see you, old pardner.

RAWLINS

All right, bud. I'll see you.

John Grady makes a sound with his teeth and Redbo turns. They ride away, leading the bay. Rawlins watches. After a few moments he holds a hand up to his face, shielding it from the glare. Or perhaps something is in his eyes...

From far away, across the prairie...

And then from farther still...

We have a long final glimpse of their figures, dwarfed by that immensity of landscape. The solitary watcher, silhouetted against the skyline. The rider and his trailing horse, drawing farther and farther apart. The great reefs of cloud overhead, where a pale winter sun is finally beginning to break through, until at last it bursts clear, dazzling our eyes, and all the colors are leached from the image before us, as we...

FADE TO WHITE.